THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

NARRATIVE SINGING AMONG THE SCOTS TRAVELLERS

A STUDY OF STROPHIC VARIATION IN BALLAD PERFORMANCE

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Ph D

University of Edinburgh

1985

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ABSTRACT OF THESIS (Regulation 7.9)

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Degree Ph D *Date* 31 March 1985

Title of Thesis Narrative Singing among the Scots Travellers:
A Study of Strophic Variation in Ballad Performance

No. of words in the main text of Thesis 75,000

Two modes of singing were evident in narrative performances recorded by Scots travellers: singing set melodies to memorized or re-created texts, and improvising on a variable melody to a memcrized or a variable text. In travellers' society both modes are acceptable but the majority of travellers today prefer set melodies. The improvisatory mode was traditional and used by the older travellers born before World War I, five of whom became my informants or Ewan MacColl's, re. Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland (1977). The tradition of narrative improvisation appears to be obsolete with the death of Mrs Martha Johnstone (Perthshire), 1980. But her 108 sung performances, 66 songs and 34 narratives recorded between 1955 and 1978, by four fieldworkers, provide valuable material for the study of strophic variability — its function in the singer's interpretation of an essential story (Lord, 1960 and Buchan, 1972) in performance. Strophic variability is related to the Danish ballad singers' usage of variable intonations, and the author's musical analysis of the diachronic variants of Martha Johnstone's improvisatory ballads follows Thorkild Knudsen's theory of ballad melody or "melodic idea" (1967, 1976).

The majority of travellers' performances, however, do not exhibit such extreme structural variations. Their ballads feature regularity manifested in a "standard strophe." In performance the regularly recurring standard strophe is fluid, composed of musical equivalents or structural options at the level of pitch, figure, motive, phrase or strophe, which the singer may or may not choose to realize. Explanations for the presence or absence of variation or variants (musical equivalents) are discussed, particularly memory failure and uncertainty on the part of the singer.

A high frequency of irregular strophes is evident in travellers' narrative songs. It can be shown that irregular strophes are often "fixed" in singers' versions. According to the author's thesis on variation as a process of volition and cognition, such irregular strophes are viewed as intentional and purposeful e.g., for expressing the climax or denouement of a narrative, or for heightening a particular dramatic or narrative episode within the singer's story. Testimonies from singers, their explanations and definitions bear out the truth of the analysis.

Fifty-three examples of narrative performances by seven of the author's informants and six of MacColl's are featured in the work; thirty-nine are complete song transcriptions; fourteen are included on an accompanying cassette. Three especial singers, and from different "homeground areas" of the travellers in Scotland, are the subjects of the study — Martha Johnstone (Perthshire), Duncan Williamson (Argyllshire) and Johnnie Whyte (Angus). The work is the result of ten years' fieldwork among the Scots travellers and four years' continuous travelling with one extended family.

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Preface

FIELDWORK, THE RECORDINGS AND THE THESIS

Fieldwork Objective and Techniques

In November 1974 when I began fieldwork among Scots travelling families, my objective was to record narrative singing in whatever form it was manifest and in circumstances as natural as possible, the travellers' environment. From Hamish Henderson's lectures in the School of Scottish Studies on Scots song in the travellers' society, and from dissertations on the sociology of the travellers in the School's library, I knew I would have to try and win the travellers' trust before I could gain true insight into their culture and obtain worthwhile recordings. In his report on "Tinkers of Perthshire and Aberdeenshire," Rehfisch had written,

> Getting to know tinkers is a slow process .... They are extremely suspicious of any and all outsiders. .... none of our subjects belonged to any voluntary associations and enjoyed no social interaction with outsiders .... the Tinkers are ascribed very low social status, in fact they play no role at all in the social life of the community [of non-travellers] in which they live.
>
> (1957, pp. i, iv and 58)

When approaching a travellers' encampment for the first time, my idea was to show them I was worthy of their trust. To this end I offered to join them in their everyday work, offering a helping hand with their jobs — picking berries, howking potatoes or "going round the doors" with paper flowers. I wanted to show my would-be informants I was willing to learn from them at the level of everyday work; giving them every indication I would not exploit them or take advantage of their knowledge. I would hopefully use

what I learned from them for their benefit as well as my own.

After the work was finished and after a family had had their tea, I would ask if it was all right to record and if the children wanted to record something — to sing or play (the chanter or pipes) or whatever they wished. It was no mystery that the children came first in every traveller family, so I always gave them first priority. Then, depending on the number of travellers present and the atmosphere, whether the gathering was lively — as in a ceilidh (see chapter one) — or a more quiet visit, I might ask particular individuals if they wanted to sing. Sometimes I did not need to ask an individual; he or she offered to sing. In the quiet circumstances of a visit, I would play a more dominant role and ask more direct questions about songs and family history. But the particular content of the recording session during a visit was very much dependent on the inclination of the informant — whether he or she was wanting to sing or not, whether he or she was disposed to answering questions about songs and singing.

During more gregarious occasions, and a visit could easily turn into a more spirited session if friends or relatives came by to enjoy the get-together or "sprachnich," I tried to merge into the background as far as possible and not exercise any kind of direction. But I had to give the travellers some idea of what I was particularly interested in or they would not have respected the fact that I was working; they would have thought I was only there to enjoy myself. During traveller ceilidhs I wouldn't need to ask individuals to sing; individuals would come forward willingly to record songs, or they would indicate that their performance for another traveller or travellers present (e.g., honouring another's request) was perfectly

all right to record. Often in ceilidhs entire groups would sing, all the members joining in a narrative song. (See chapter two.)

When individuals came forward or showed a preference to be recorded over others in the group, then I would show a willingness to listen to, and an appreciation of, their own choice of songs — whether "the old songs" or country and western songs or their own compositions. Some of these I would record even though they weren't the narratives I was seeking, because I knew it was important not to insult the singer. I continued to be appreciative if a traveller continued to sing country and western songs, but I would switch off the tape recorder after one or two of these. The singer and others present realized then I was more interested in something else. But I never "switched off" my attention, and thus they never took offense.

Once the travellers learned what my objective was, and after I had given them — all who wanted to — opportunities to record whatever they wanted; I would perhaps start questioning singers in between performances about their knowledge of "old songs." Many individuals preferred to sing rather than speak replies and sometimes I did not get very far with direct questioning.

With some individuals, however, after I had visited them two and three times, it was possible to discuss performances and musical concepts. But often the circumstances of recording in tents, in the close quarters of caravans or at the firsides in small houses were not conducive to discussing abstract concepts. Children and other members of the family were needing the attention of my informant at the same time!

In general, the travellers preferred to sing or demonstrate their knowledge of songs for me. But with some families with whom I developed a close rapport e.g., the Whytes in Montrose and the Williamsons near Lochgilphead, ceilidhs would ensue when all members of the extended family present might join in discussing ideas about old songs, good songs, good singers, good singing, etc. These discussions were not necessarily started by me, and they never took up more time or were more important than performances of songs, stories or music.

From the very start of my fieldwork it was not difficult for travellers to understand my goals, or for them to accept me as a song collector. Their easy acceptance of me was contingent on the good work of those who had preceded me.

My Predecessors in the Field

Less than thirty-five years ago the tape recording of oral literature from Scottish travellers had begun, for academic study of native traditional culture in the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University. Hamish Henderson, a member of staff from the time of the School's official beginning in 1951, had been the first scholar to meet the travellers in their camps and record them there. Hamish was the first to recognize the dynamism of the travellers' oral culture:

> .... in 1952 and 1953 to be precise, when concentrated fieldwork started among the travelling people, and hundreds of songs and stories from non-literate informants were recorded. At camp fires in the berryfields of Blairgowrie, in council houses at Perth, and in the heart of secret-looking woodlands in the Mearns (an ancestral hideout) members of the travelling fraternity, young and old, sang rare Child ballads, lyric love-songs, execution broadside ballads, kids' rhymes, contemporary pop songs, you name it, they sang it. The only trouble (if you can call it trouble) was that everyone sang, or wanted to sing, right down to the smallest children .... What one encountered, in that dry-

> stick wood, in Jeannie Robertson's house in Causewayend, and at the Standing Stones berry field on the road to Essendy, was this wonderful fluid thing representing the actual world of the ballad singers, a shared sensibility still artistically vital and fertile.
>
> (Henderson, 1980, pp. 85-6)

Other reputable song and folklore collectors, Alan Lomax, Kenneth Goldstein and Herschel Gower were introduced by Henderson to his traveller informants, streetsingers and narrators. Not only extraordinary performances of songs and stories by travellers, but entire evenings spent in company with them had impressed these collectors in the 50s sufficiently so that nearly three decades later at least one was still thinking about his experience of the travellers' oral tradition in superlatives. Herschel Gower recollected in 1979 that the ceilidh he and Russel Hart had participated in at Jeannie Robertson's house in Aberdeen during September 1953 had been "indeed, one of the unique nights of our lives because never have song and story had such force as for the group with whom we sat." (Gower, 1983, p. 138)

In the 1960s song collectors, Peter Shepherd, Helen Fullarton and Geordie McIntyre made further contact with traveller musicians and storytellers, visits and re-visits which resulted in close friendships with some travelling families. Hamish Henderson had distinguished between the "resident collector," who is in many ways an integral "part of tradition, a chronicler and remembrancer of the culture around him," and the collector who enters a community from the outside. (Preface to Goldstein, 1964) Shepherd and Fullarton were not native Scots and it is perhaps for this very reason that they were able to penetrate the barrier of suspicion which the travelling people normally put between themselves and the

"country hantle," the non-travellers or the host community so often responsible for the hardships travellers as a minority group have had to endure. (See Munro, 1984, pp. 207 - 210.) But successful field-work among the travelling people is not dependent on the researcher's nationality; it depends on something far more human:

> .... most successful collectors, do, in fact, have something in common. Dr Goldstein comes near the heart of the matter when he says, commenting on a remark by Samuel B. Bayard: 'The collector who is incapable of becoming involved with his informants, of developing a 'deep loving regard' for them, had best restrict his collecting to 'transient' folklore.
>
> (Henderson, 1964, pp. ix - x)

For Peter Shepherd, the exhilaration of hearing songs he had never expected to have been sung by singers of this century, the excitement of discovering the rich bounty of ballads the travellers knew, was still vividly memorable fifteen years after he had made his recordings. "Every one was a Child ballad!" he exclaimed to me in a discussion about the common ground of our work in February 1982. Shepherd's recordings are lodged in his archives at Balmalcolm House and his work collecting among the travellers of Scotland and Ireland should be considered an important achievement. As a later researcher I was positively received by the travelling people after Shepherd had impressed them by his friendly approach and honest desire to learn from his informants' great traditions.

Another important collector among the Scots travellers was Maurice Fleming. He began his work in the 1950s and worked closely with Henderson. Although Fleming had not been able to take up folklore research among the travelling people as a professional or academic, his abiding care for the welfare of the travellers and their just recognition continues to this day. He has written me about the effect

on his life the travellers made. I am quite certain the admiration and respect was mutual, for when I first visited the village of Blairgowrie in 1975, the travellers there spoke fondly of Maurice and encouraged me to see him.

> So one evening I toiled up to a traveller encampment [in the early fifties] above Rattray and asked about old songs. The man I spoke to directed me down the hill again to the Stewarts' home, then a wooden house at the Rattray Cross, near where Belle still lives. .... Before long I had a tape recorder lent to me by the School .... with it I recorded Belle, Alex, Sheila and eventually Cathie (she didn't sing to begin with). They arranged ceilidhs in their house to which other travellers came — Kelbies, Whytes, Higginses. .... There were also recording sessions at the home of Bella Higgins (Alex's sister) and I recorded her and brother Andy. .... the Blairgowrie days .... were certainly the most exciting of my life and I only wish I had done it a lot more thoroughly and systematically than I did.
>
> (Fleming, Letter, 1/8/84)

Taped recordings of traveller singers, storytellers and musicians multiplied in the 1970s with staff members of the School, Peter Cooke, Ailie Munro and Alan Bruford, becoming involved in the documentation of traditions among the travelling community. They were most interested in understanding travellers' testimonies and realized the distorted picture single items, songs and stories collected out of context, could give. The richness of the travellers' culture was easily misinterpreted or misrepresented, and the sensitivity of these researchers in the field was the model for my own approach.

My Recordings — the Essential Data

From 1974 - 1976 I made visits from my Edinburgh base to traveller families in the following regions: in Tayside — Angus (16 families), Perthshire (19); Fife (1 family); Grampian — Kincardine (2 families), Aberdeenshire (2); Strathclyde — Argyll (15 families), Lanarkshire (6); Lothian — Midlothian (2). In the Coatbridge site (Strathclyde)

I recorded one English traveller family. The rest were Scots.

During the summer of 1976 I married traveller Duncan Williamson. For four and a half years, until October 1980, we belonged to the nomadic fraternity of Scots travelling people and lived exclusively in a "gelly," an enlarged version of the normally four-foot bow tent. See plates 1 and 2. The aims of my research were not altered by my becoming a traveller's wife, but they were necessarily restricted in geographical scope. My attention was focused on a select number of singers and musicians as I endeavored to assimilate the culture of a minority group and experience directly a nomadic way of life purported to be vanishing. During my travelling years, recordings from another six traveller families (Argyll, 2 and Fife, 4) were made. Since settling into a farm cottage in Strathmiglo, Fife, 1980, I have recorded members from a further two families — totalling 70 traveller families in nine years, a total of 138 informants (136 Scots, 2 Romany).

Forty of the families I recorded were living in tents or caravans, still travelling all the year round during the period 1976 - 1980. Over half of the forty families still in "camps" before 1980 were recorded in Strathclyde Region (18 in Argyll). Six were camped in Fife, ten in Tayside and two on Duddingston Site in Edinburgh. Twenty-five traveller families were housed, living in Tayside; four resided in Grampian Region. Five families were camping but spent the worst part of the year (winter months) in houses.

All informants considered themselves "travellers." Many had been born in a camp i.e., a tent, and were still camping and proud of the fact — often marking their identity as a "traveller" by birth out-of-doors and a life-long ability to endure the hardships of a camping (nomadic) life. Those who were housed still considered

themselves travellers because of their personal habits, work and outlook on life. They did not think they had become any less a traveller by settling. Not every one I recorded was regarded as a "full" traveller, for the travellers distinguish between those who are born of two traveller parents and those who are offspring of one non-traveller — these children, male and female, are known as "bucks." But every traveller clan has its "bucks" and I did not discriminate in my research.

Plate 1. Encampment of traveller Williamsons, Lingerton Lay-by, A83, near Lochgilphead. My summer "home," 1976 - 1980.

Plate 2. Winter camp in Tarvit Farm wood, near Cupar, Fife. My husband, Duncan Williamson, is going to put on a good fire inside the gelly! This wood was our winter quarters, 1976 - 1979.

Of the 136 travellers recorded, 102 recorded songs. Of these, 50 sang ballads. 34 of these singers of narrative songs are listed with their addresses at the time of recording, and other pertinent information, in Appendix B. I have selected them because they were most helpful in my research into old songs or balladry and also because they or their relatives or families might prove to be useful contacts for future research.

Of the 50 who sang narratives, six became my special informants whom I recorded intensively or frequently. They are: Bessie Whyte and Johnnie Whyte of Angus (Montrose); Nellie Stewart of Kincardine (Banchory); Martha Johnstone of Perthshire; John MacDonald of Lanarkshire and Duncan Williamson of Argyllshire and Fife. The narratives these six singers recorded are listed under their names in the appendix. John MacDonald, Nellie Stewart and Johnnie Whyte each recorded ten narratives in song. Bessie sang eight complete narratives and knew another five as fragments of fuller songs she couldn't remember. Duncan has recorded twenty-two complete narratives in song, but he knows an additional eighteen which have not been recorded in full because they are not part of his "active" repertoire. Martha Johnstone was recorded singing thirty-four ballads out of a sum total of sixty-six songs performed for four different fieldworkers who visited her from 1955 - 1978.

The songs. From 1974 - 1983 I recorded a total of 196 hours of music and lore from travellers, including oral history, biographical information, cracks, stories and riddles, etc. 136 hours were musical performances, mostly singing but including a total of about two hours of piping, diddling and playing of the chanter. Approximately 500 different songs were recorded — many of which were recorded in multiple versions, sung by different travellers, and many of which were repeated on different occasions — totalling approximately 1300 sung items. 400 of the 500 songs have been catalogued according to narrative and non-narrative types — the other hundred have yet to be entered in the catalogue. 75 per cent of the 400 were non-narrative songs with a wide range of textual content. They included lullabies, many bawdy songs, bothy ballads, singing games, working songs in Gaelic and love songs with texts about separation, rejection, defiance, faithfulness, the girl's beauty, parting, meeting and waiting. There were also songs in praise of the Scottish and Irish homelands, songs of invitation and courtship — usually failure or refusal. Burns's compositions, pop songs, country and western (especially songs learned from Gene Autrey discs), and songs commemorating war heroes and battles were popular. The ballads, numbering a hundred, represented 25 per cent of the total catalogued songs. The travellers' definitions of "ballad," and its inclusion in the "old song" genre, are discussed along with other song categories in chapter two.

The Thesis — Aim and Method

The aim of the thesis is to clarify a formal feature of story singing, to make steps towards a truthful understanding of narration

in song as it survives in traveller culture, a dynamic culture where storytelling together with singing have been traditional activities for centuries.

After introducing the travellers as a distinct minority group, I discuss their singing tradition, beginning with the travellers' concepts of "singer" and "good singer." The emphasis of the first chapter, when and why travellers sing and why some don't sing, is comparable to Lord's opening account of guslars in The Singer of Tales (1960).

Chapter two also begins with travellers' definitions. Here the emphasis is on "what" the travellers sing, and the ballad as a "long song" is defined. A discussion of narration in song with prose elements i.e., the performance practice of "song with speech" as it pertains to specific ballads, points to the concern of traveller singers with communicating a complete story. In this chapter the subject of transmission in an oral culture is discussed and the travellers' general bias against book learning.

Chapter three begins the musical analysis of variation in strophic performances of narrative songs. But first the travellers' concepts of "tune," "proper air," "wrang air," "different" and "similiar" [sic] tunes are discussed. The chapter centres on the element of regularity in strophic songs performed by the majority of traveller singers today. Definitions of "standard strophe" and "variant" are provided as key terms for the analysis of variation in strophic narrative singing. The ideas in the second half of the chapter are basically a criticism of Ewan MacColl's method of presenting tunes and texts of songs he and Peggy Seeger collected from travellers, 1962 - 1975, in Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland (1977).

Chapter four focuses on the irregularities of strophic structure in travellers' narrative performances; the study is confined mainly to those narratives which feature consistent irregularities in one singer's version of a ballad i.e., strophe variants. This particular kind of variation is analyzed as an intentional device by singers to express certain parts of their stories e.g., the dramatic climaxes or the denouements. Here I have found it appropriate to follow Hendren's lead on the significance of irregularity in the sung ballad as outlined in his Study of Ballad Rhythm (1936).

Chapter five is concerned with strophic variability in the narrative songs of Martha Johnstone. Fourteen performances of four ballads sung to "melodic ideas" (as defined by Knudsen in his editorial introduction to Danmarks gamle Folkeviser XI (1976)) are analyzed. The aim of the chapter is to understand how and why one singer of tales should perform a story with variable texts or variable melodies in diachronic performances — even when the verbal text has been clearly memorized. Differences in performances of an "essential story" (Lord) are analyzed, according to the singer's musical and verbal testimonies; and discussed, within the context of ballad improvisation as a tradition among the Scots travellers.

Chapter six concludes the thesis with a summary of the different kinds of strophic variation in the narrative song performances of Johnnie Whyte, Duncan Williamson and Martha Johnstone. Tentative explanations are offered as to why the more extreme kind of variation, strophic variability or intoning a melody, is now, with the death of Martha Johnstone in 1980, apparently obsolete. Johnnie Whyte has also died recently, but his style of singing and the kinds of irregularities and phrase variants found in his narrative performances are still

evident in traveller singing tradition. Duncan Williamson's performances of narrative songs share some of the same variability present in Martha's narrative repertoire, but not to the same degree — he prefers the quatrain form and a rhyming verse to Martha's more prosaic improvisations. In this last chapter I briefly review a few topics for future research, questions raised by my study of narrative singing and strophic variation which I could not answer adequately because certain details about the travellers and their culture remain unknown.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Peter Cooke who had the difficult task of supervising this thesis. As a nontraveller married to a traveller and living outwith the university environment, I had many problems sorting out my ideas from the travellers' concepts and then expressing both effectively in writing. Music is a subject which defies the two-dimensional limitations of paper, and superior intelligence is required to know precisely how to discuss musical concepts from another culture, transcribe the music and analyze it so a reader can understand that music as a product of another culture. The value of Peter's supervision on this part of my work is inestimable.

I should also like to thank Professor John MacQueen, the director of the School of Scottish Studies, for his helpful comments on an early draft of chapters three, four and five. His wise counsel at the start of my degree research in 1975 stayed with me to the finish. I am deeply grateful to Hamish Henderson who listened most carefully to my ideas and whose response helped me solve problems of approach — how to understand the travellers' intentionality in ballad singing,

their special view of "art" and life. Hamish's love of the travelling people and his reverence for Jeannie Robertson were a reminder that my strong feelings for traveller individuals were not irrational. Emily Lyle was also supportive in my research, and I appreciated her loaning me materials from her library.

Fred Kent, the School's technician, deserves a big "thank-you." He not only made all the black and white prints and the cassette which speak directly for the travellers in the thesis; but from the very beginning of my fieldwork Fred had the patience to work with me. Fred made it possible for me to buy a portable Uher so I could become more independent in my work, and he was most generous by giving me equipment the School no longer needed.

My fellow research workers, Maurice Fleming (The Scots Magazine) and Peter Shepherd (Springthyme Records), were very helpful in giving me objective accounts of their fieldwork and their relationships with Martha Johnstone. Peter was especially kind to make copies of Martha's songs from the three visits he and Lena made to her cottage in Bankfoot in 1967. These recordings supplied the "missing link" between the earlier and later sessions with Martha (in the 50s and the 70s). David Clement of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland must also be thanked for his assistance in my early research among the Argyllshire travellers. I should never have made friends with "Clachan Jake" and the Kintyre Townsleys so readily had it not been for David's excellent way of making travellers feel his equal.

I should like to acknowledge the publishers Routledge and Kegan Paul, who granted me permission to use xeroxed copies of songs from MacColl's and Seeger's 1977 collection, Travellers' Songs from

England and Scotland in the main text.

My bank manager, Mr John Brodie of Cupar, must also be thanked. Without his lucid financial advice and encouragement on my work as an editor and musicologist, I should never have had the peace of mind requisite to finishing the thesis.

To the travellers of Scotland I owe the maturity of my education. In writing, my gratitude will not be appreciated by them; I will only be able to impress them by giving in return. And I sincerely hope this work will be a credit to their nation. Although the Whytes of Montrose and the Williamsons of Lochgilphead were my dearest informants, I could never forget the hospitality of all families I stayed with. There were, of course, a few who simply couldn't understand my work and my motives -- I was chased away on a number of occasions! But these travellers were not at fault -- for my upsetting them I apologize. Duncan's first family, my seven step-children, and their families have been most tolerant of my marriage to their "naiscowl." When, as a traveller's wife, I should have been content with two beautiful children and a good husband; they overlooked my predilection for study and accepted me as "Linda." [naiscowl = father]

Finally, I should like to acknowledge the financial support I was granted from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Music of Edinburgh University. The three-year Gatty Scholarship, 1974 - 1977, and the Helen Doig Bursary, 1981 - 1983, not only enabled me to get on with the work; but also gave me confidence that the task was worthwhile and could be completed. For allowing me extra time to reformulate chapters and revise certain parts of the thesis, I am indebted to the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

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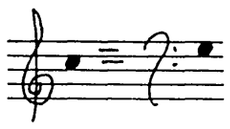
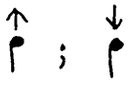
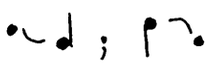
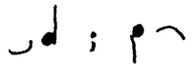
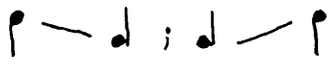
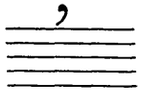
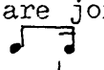
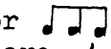
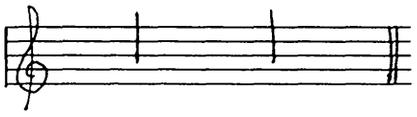
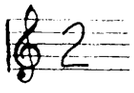
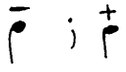
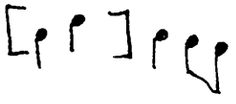
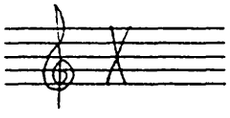
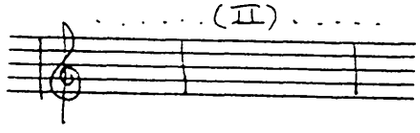
Table of Musical Signs

In general, the transcriptions are not detailed -- this applies especially to rhythmic features. Depending on the particular purposes of a transcription, more details may be shown; the table of signs explains the meaning of extra conventions which are adopted.

Sign	Meaning
Pitch	
a. 	absolute pitch is to the right of ' = '
b. 	pitch is sharpened or flatted
Articulation	
a. 	main pitch is preceded or followed by a pitch of attack or release
b. 	main pitch is preceded or followed by a slide from or to an indefinite pitch
c. 	pitches are separated by a descending or ascending slide
d. 	sound cut short (staccato)
e. 	pause or breath
Tempo	
a. ♩ = 66	constant metronomic speed applicable
b. ♩ ≐ 60	metronomic speed only approximated
c. ♩ ± 72 ; (♩ = 72)	an average speed is partially or often applicable

Sign	Meaning
Metre	
a. 	top digit = number of beats per measure; bottom note = given beat value; subdivisions of the beat are joined with beams e.g.,  or  or  =  where is the given beat value
b. 	metre is organized according to poetic stress
c. 	generally two beats per measure, following the stresses of the verse
Rhythm 	shortening of pitch or elongation of pitch
Speech Sounds	
a. 	half spoken pitch
b. 	speech within the song metre
Mistakes	
a. 	bracketed pitches indicate singer's mistake — followed by the correction
b. 	mistake not transcribed, or not completely notated
Labels	
a. 	upper case Roman numeral indicates strophe number within a performance
b. 	Arabic number in parentheses indicates musical phrase within a strophe, unless otherwise indicated

Sign		Meaning
c.	A	upper case letter refers to a phrase or intonation within a strophe
d.	a	lower case letter generally refers to a motive within a phrase, unless otherwise indicated
e.	i	lower case Roman numeral refers to figure within a motive or phrase, unless otherwise indicated
f.	Aa	phrase motive identified
g.	I/Aa	strophe motive identified
h.		above the staff, a Roman numeral in parentheses with dots on either side, means the music of that strophe is repeated

Stanza definition		
a.	‖	two broken vertical lines indicate uncertainty of strophe division at end of incomplete measure
b.	‖	one broken line after solid line indicates uncertainty of strophe division at end of complete measure

List of Abbreviations

BR, ST	The Singing Tradition of Child's Popular Ballads, ed. B. H. Bronson.
BR, TTCB	The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads, compiled by B.H. Bronson, 4 vols.
BW	Betsy (Bessie) Whyte, informant.
CH	The English and Popular Ballads, comp. by F.J. Child, 5 vols.
CS	Re. casette recording of the example accompanying the thesis.
DCTS	Report of the Departmental Committe on Tinkers in Scotland.
DW	Duncan Williamson, informant.
G-D	The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection, 8 vols.
Greig, FS	Folk-Song in Buchan and Folk-Song of the North-East (Transactions of the Buchan Field Club, IX).
JM	John MacDonald, informant.
JW	Johnnie Whyte, informant.
L	Linda Williamson, the author.
MC	Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger.
m.	motive.
MJ	Martha Johnstone, informant.
NS	Nellie Stewart, informant.
Sharp CEF	Cecil Sharp's Collection of English Folk Songs, ed. M. Karpeles, 2 vols.
Sharp, EFS	English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions by C.J. Sharp.

SS	Scottish Studies, Journal of the School of Scottish Studies (University of Edinburgh, 1957 -)
STP	Scotland's Travelling People. Three reports of the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People.
(71/11/A1)	Following a quotation, inside parentheses and outside, a six (or a four) digit number refers to the registration number of a 5-inch reel to reel tape recording lodged in the Sound Archives of the School of Scottish Studies (University of Edinburgh). The first two digits refer to the year of recording — minus the "19". The second group of numbers or number refers to the chronological position within the series of all tapes recorded that year. The third group, including an upper case A or B, (missing in the 1955 and 1957 tape registrations) refers to the track and the item number on the tape.
(PS 67/3)	Copy of a tape recorded by Peter Shepherd in 1967, lodged in his archives at Balmalcolm House, Kingskettles, Fife.
(LS T.10.A.)	Copy of a Linguistic Survey tape made by David Clement, lodged in the Archives of the Linguistic Survey, University of Edinburgh.
....	An editorial omission — by this author.
. . .	Elipsis indicating speaker's hesitation or interrupted thought.

Annotated Glossary

Scots and Cant Words

The spellings of Scots words in the thesis will not be consistent because they are dialectal, varying according to the singer's own pronunciation of the language. I have followed the spellings of words as published in Tocher, the magazine "based on a selection of traditional material and memories from the archives [sound] of the School of Scottish Studies in the University of Edinburgh." (Bruford, 1980, introductory note to Tocher) I have also used David Murison's The Guid Scots Tongue (1977) for guidelines on spelling, punctuation and grammar. But in every case, I have presented the words of my informants exactly as they said them — barring any concept of "right" and "wrong" grammar. Some of the word forms are "unetymological" because, as Hugh Shields noted about the folk singing in North Derry, "The singer cares less for etymology than for phonetic effects." (1981, p. 34) Another characteristic of the singers' texts and verbal testimonies is the presence of English pronunciations and words; this bilingualism, or linguistic mixing, is typical of Scots song — re. Hamish Henderson's article on the language of Scots folksong in Scotland and the Lowland Tongue (1983).

Words used occasionaly in the thesis are glossed in the margin. Some of the more commonly used words are listed here.

ae	one
ə	supplementary syllable
bene cane [been kane]	mansion
bene mort [been ...]	a lady
bing avrie [.... avree]	go away, be away!
bing	come; take
bray, bree	brew
cam	came
chaet	thing
chiel	man, young man
gadgie	man
gurie	girl
mort	woman
shan	shameful
wad	would

Analytical Terms

essential story	in traveller terms, "the way the story goes;" the basic narrative of the tale which remains the same through differences in performing (Lord, 1960, pp. 97, 117)
intonation	synonymous with phrase, but connoting a higher degree of variability; used in the context of improvisation
line	denotes a verbal phrase only -- does not apply to musical phrase
motive	melodic move or motif (Cowdery, 1984) generally coincident with the textual half-phrase or half-line
phrase	does not apply to verbal text; strictly applies to music; a musical unit, often four measures in length and terminated by a cadence; is, with very few exceptions, associated with one or more phrases (cf. Stein, 1962, pp. 22 - 27)
rubato	press the tempo onward
strophe	musical division of a song usually coincident with the textual verse or stanza
subjective tonic	the tonality of the song has an acoustic-psychological basis which is not necessarily universal, true for all listeners; hence allowance is made for an alternative tonic, one which could be determined on a set of criteria derived from travellers' own understanding of "key-note" or cadence
variant	a structural equivalent at the level of pitch, motive, phrase or strophe, evident in its repeated or regular use in a performance or performances; not applicable to occasional variation which may originate in error or in improvisatory passages; the term is related to Lord's definition

of "formula:" in the course of time and of much practice, the need for a particular phrase arises over and over again, a phrase becomes set in the poet's mind -- he uses it regularly; then, only then, is the formula really born." (1960, p. 43)

variant (of a ballad) one performance of a singer's narrative song; used in the discussion of diachronic performances of a singer's song

Introduction

THE SCOTS TRAVELLERS: SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

Who are the Travellers?

Defining the origins of the travellers in Scotland is a subject for an entire dissertation. "Tinker" is the traditional appellation of members of the group -- but it has derogatory connotations due to the group's history of adversity and poor social relationship with the settled community. Frank Vallee's definition of "tinkers" in his sociological dissertation, "The Tinkers of Scotland" (1955) is commendable; they are a "general category of the Scottish population outside any particular community context." (1955, chapter two, no page number) But the definition is vague and nondescript.

The generally accepted theory of the Scottish travellers' origin is that they were aborigines, belonging to an early caste of metal-workers, probably of high social standing. "Ceard" is Gaelic for artificer and the Scots, "caird," was used "specially" in the Scottish Highlands for tinkers who "required the epithet 'wandering' to distinguish them." (Report of the DCTS, 1918, p. 5) Although the travellers' racial origin has not been proven, one fact seems most certain: they are an indigenous group with different origins from the gypsies in Britain. (Vallee, 1955, chapter one) This truth was officially recognized by the end of World War I in the 1918 government Report.

> .... the tinker is less an immigrant than the descendant of an aboriginal native race. .... although they have inherited much of the gypsies' blood, something of their language .... they are to a consi-

> derable extent a product of our own race — men and women of a primitive type whose forbears reacted against the conditions of organised industry, and who, by will power or by chance, were able to avoid the discipline forced on most men by the common needs of life.
>
> (DCTS, 1918, p. 22)

The travellers' physical characteristics, according to Gentleman's official report of 1971, are not distinct in appearance from the rest of the Scottish populace. (Scotland's Travelling People, HMSO, 1971, pp. 57, 84) This bears out the theory that Scottish travellers are not of gypsy stock: many, at least half, are fair haired and the blonde trait is dominant in mixed marriages between paler and darker skinned travellers. Some facial features do distinguish one traveller clan from another, and some travellers recognise subtle physical differences between the clans. The common marriage pattern, between first cousins, would naturally reinforce strengths and weaknesses within particular family groups. But marrying out of the traveller community has been a trend since the postwar period of the 50s, thus complicating the ethnic composition of the group.[1]

Because the origin of the Scottish travellers as a single group is impossible to prove or determine with precision, the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People, appointed in 1971, has refrained from discussing the subject. (cf. Third Report, 1982, p. 17) Determination of the ethnic composition of the group could, however, have important political ramifications for the community's future: for example, the provisions of the Race Relations Act, 1976, protects against discrimination of ethnic minority groups. Whether or not the Act applies to Scottish travellers remains controversial until they are officially defined as an ethnic minority group.

Where are the Travellers in Scotland?

The travelling people of Scotland are a minority group distinguished from the main community of Scots and Gaels by their nomadism and habitat. They may be found in each of the nine regions in the country and also in the Island areas, though many travelling families in the Orkneys and the Hebrides have settled in houses. (STP, 1982, p. 26) The region with the highest concentration of travelling people is Strathclyde and another main area is Tayside. Accurate and comprehensive information on the numbers and distribution of travellers in Scotland is lacking. But the Advisory Committee to the Secretary of State for Scotland has been issuing reports at three-year intervals on travellers in Scottish regions, and in the Second Report (1978) are tables with data on traveller numbers in the various regions based on surveys conducted by local authorities and travellers themselves. (See STP, 1978, Appendix 2, pp. 27 - 37.)

The official estimate of travelling travellers, according to the Advisory Committee, is five hundred families. "Family" was defined in the explanatory notes of the Scottish Development Department's "Census of 'Travellers'" form of March 1969:

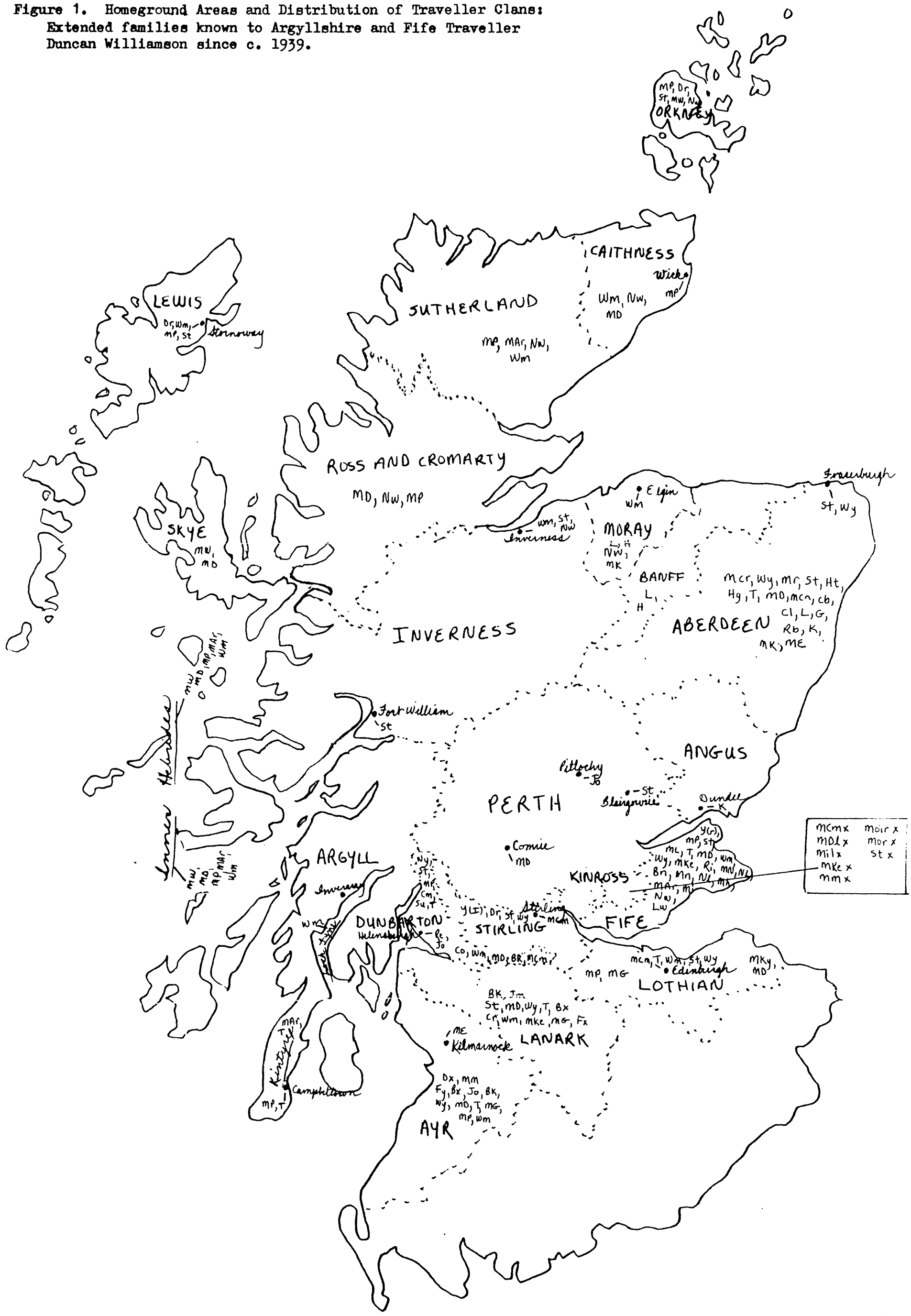
> The family unit can usually be regarded as those members for whom housekeeping and cooking is done communally. They may be living in more than one caravan or other dwelling and may include more than two generations.
>
> (Gentleman, 1971, Appendix 1, p. 118)

A statutory definition of the travelling segment of the group has been included in the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Bill, 1982: " .... persons of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin ...." (STP, 1982, p. 17) The main feature of the Scottish travellers' nomadism is their attachment to home areas. "Evidence suggests that .... travellers will retain links with their home areas

even if this means that they have to live under difficult conditions." (Gentleman, 1971, p. 113)

A map (fig. 1) shows the homeground areas where some members of extended traveller families may regularly be found living either in houses or in caravans or, less likely, in tents on authorized or unauthorized sites. A traveller family's home area is not defined by the birth of family members; it is marked by an ancestral burial ground. The map does not show the newer regional division of the country because it does not correspond to the home areas, the boundaries of which in nearly all cases coincide with the older county or shire divisions.[2] Common surnames in different counties signify different branches of a single clan. The distribution of the clans is based on the testimonies of Duncan Williamson, originally of Argyllshire and now living in Fife.[3] The separate family branches of a traveller clan often claim "no connection" to each other, but traveller genealogists can and do trace common ancestry of distinct branches. Among the group it is a truism that all travellers bear kinship relation to one another or are related through marriage. Scottish travellers are a single group.

Figure 1. Homeground Areas and Distribution of Traveller Clans: Extended families known to Argyllshire and Fife Traveller Duncan Williamson since c. 1939.



Clan Map, Key

. . . . . Select shire boundaries, defining homeground areas

——/ Specific area-based families (within a shire or island group)

•— Village- or city-based families

Traveller clan names

Bk - Burke
Bn - Burns
Bx - Baxter
Cb - Campbell
Cl - Croal
Cm - Cameron
Cr - Crawfurd
Dn - Donaldson
Dr - Drummond
Dx - Dixon
Fx - Foxton
Fy - Foyes
G - Gillins
Hg - Higgins
Ht - Hutchison
Jo - Johnstone
Jm - Jamieson
K - Kelby
L - Lindsay
Lw - Lowder
MA - MacArthur
MAr - MacAllister
MCm - MacCallum
MCmx- MacCallum, predominantly mixed marriages between traveller and nontraveller families
MCn - MacConnachie
MD - MacDonald
MDlx- MacDougal, ... mixed ....
ME - McEwan
MG - MacGregor
Mh - Maholan
Mi - Michie
Milx- Miller .... mixed ....
MK - MacKay
MKe - MacKenzie
MKex- MacKenzie .... mixed ....
ML - MacLaren
MM - MacMillan
MMx - MacMillan .... mixed ....
MN - MacNichol
Moirx - .... mixed ....
Morx- Morton .... mixed ....
MP - McPhee
Mr - Munro
MW - MacWilliam
Nl - Nelson
Nw - Newland
Rb - Robertson
Re - Reid
Ri - Riley
St - Stewart
Stx - Stewart, predominantly mixed ....
Su - Sutherland
T - Townsley
Wy - Whyte
Wm - Williamson
Y(I)- Young (Irish)
Y(r)- Young (resident)

Some Characteristics of the Group Relevant to a Study of Variation

The official research project on Scotland's travelling people was conducted by Hugh Gentleman and Susan Swift in 1969 and published by the Scottish Development Department in 1971. Gentleman's work is undoubtedly the most comprehensive study of the life and needs of the travelling people in Scotland and no sociological or anthropological study on the same scale has been attempted since his report. It will be helpful to review a few of his important points as they relate to my study on traveller singing and variation.

Gentleman noted that the diversity within the traveller community is extensive: ".... in Scotland the differences within the group can be almost as great as the difference between the group and the settled population." (1971, p. 57) And he also wrote in a chapter referring to the travellers' special problems in Scotland,

> Although the travellers can be defined as a single group by many aspects of their way of life, they are divided into many types of subgroups — regionally, ethnically, by social class, occupation and family structure — possibly to a greater extent in Scotland than in England and Wales.
>
> (p. 93)

The significance of this point for the study of singing by travellers is that we might not expect singers from different regions to have the same attitudes towards specific songs. For example, the supernatural ballad of "The Twa Sisters" (CH 10) was considered "silly" by two narrative singers, Duncan Williamson and Jimmie Hughes, both from Argyllshire. (75/97/A1 and 76/42/B2) Yet it is so well liked by one traveller clan in the North-East that it has crystallized into a family version. It is sung by Whytes in Angus and Aberdeenshire to a fixed tune and text — featuring a consistent irregularity in one part of the story when the magical fiddle is made. (See ex. 12 ,

chapter four.) Also, versions of songs known by travellers from different regions of the country will feature different metric peculiarities stemming from the different dialects. The prominent "ie" endings of spoken words by travellers living in the North-East find their way into the singers' performances, and these supplementary syllables undermine a strict musical metre. (See Johnnie Whyte's "Dowie Dens," ex. 11, chapter three.) In the Western Highlands, verbal texts are not so very ornamental in song and musical metre is, on the whole, more regular. Singers' attitudes and styles of singing may vary greatly within the traveller group, depending on the particular regional subgroup to which a traveller belongs.

Gentleman also noted that "the travellers' life is on the whole a very competitive one and their individualism largely amounts to an instinct of self preservation." (1971, p. 93) He had been discussing the economic hierarchy within the traveller community and the hostility between the different "social classes" of travellers. Rivalry and jealousy can be strong and bitter especially by travellers towards others outside their extended family who are more fortunate or more financially secure. But the basic hostility of travellers towards one another is not because of economic differences. Antagonism exists when traveller ethics and mores have been violated; a most serious crime, for example, is cursing another's forbears. Verbal insult invariably leads to fighting with fists and an attack against one is an attack against one's family, extending to the in-laws as well. Acts of revenge or vengeful behaviour and attitudes are justified according to traveller mores. When ethical crimes are committed, retaliation is expected. Clemency is cowardice. In this way, personal issues

automatically assume the status of family grievances. And the violent feelings associated with feuds are still very much in evidence between some families and clans. "Feuds between families are often of very longstanding and it is recognised by the travellers that certain families are hostile towards each other and all contact between them is to be avoided." (Gentleman, 1971, p. 56)

In accordance with the violent feelings members of families are wont to express, we can expect to find strong allegiance to song versions transmitted within the family and a concomittant attitude of conservatism towards variation and change of those songs. Irregularities in song structure may have a long history within the specific family tradition of some singers' old songs. Memories of ancestors are very sacred to travellers and the singing of an old song that has been handed down from a grandparent or great-grandparent usually carries with it intensely emotional feeling. Some traditional family songs were too emotive for the men to perform, such that they could not sing without taking alcoholic beverage to help sober the song's effect. (See chapter two.)

Another characteristic of the traveller community which may be most pertinent to the study of song form and variation is the group's lack of internal organization — beyond the family — the disinclination of families and clans to join forces, together or with others, other than as squads for gathering potatoes. According to the Advisory Committee's Second Report, travelling people are individualists or family based "by nature." (1978, p. 21) In each of the Advisory Committee's three reports, the travellers' family traditions and independent outlook have been cited as the cause for the travellers' failure to organise themselves into a unified body, "like most other

disadvantaged groups in society. This has affected their capacity to put their case to local councils and communities." (STP, 1982, p. 45)

It may well be the case that travellers do not see any advantages to their joining organisations or forming a traveller organisation covering the whole of Scotland because the quality and longevity of their traditions have proved to them conclusively, survival depends on the traveller's ability to resist integration with the settled community. Survival is not contingent upon order or coherent unity but rather upon diversity and adaptability. Travellers have had to develop resourcefulness and improvisation at the level of the individual, to be reinforced at family level. To physically organise or participate at group level would counteract traveller logic and repel the natural life force of a traveller's world. "We now recognise that a formal organisation of travellers may not be practicable or appropriate in the Scottish context." (STP, 1982, p. 21)

Reflecting the travellers' disinclination to organize, it will be unlikely to find standardized texts and tunes of songs common to members of different families. Regularity may be prominent in some songs by one traveller and those same songs might be disorderly or improvisatory in another traveller's performances. We might expect to find individual singing styles, or individual preferences for songs and themes or melodies. A consensus of opinion on good songs, good singing, and good singers will be nonexistent.

Oral Literature as a Focus for Understanding the Travellers' Culture

The tinker cant, in widespread use by Scottish travellers at the beginning of the twentieth century, with its roots in Elizabethan

English, was used as an argument for the tinkers' presence in Scotland long before 1505 when the gypsies' entry from Europe was recorded in the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer (cited by the DCTS, 1918, p. 5). Today the travellers' cant is commonly held to be a "secret language"[4] i.e., used by travellers when in the presence of outsiders, while in shops, etc. But as Gentleman pointed out, there is no reason to suppose some travellers do not regularly use it among themselves. (1971, p. 57) The Johnstone travellers of Dunoon "spoke nothing but cant" according to Duncan Williamson who was frequently in contact with them during the 1950s and 60s, as was his mother who also commented on this. "Ged" and "Naiscowl" were the cant words used by older traveller children (after the age of ten) to nomally address their father; "Hoy" or "Naismort" were used for "Mother." Today the English "Daddy" and "Mummy" are more usual.

Cant songs composed by the travellers are numerous but opportunities to record the material are rarely had because the sung texts are intended as private communication between singer(s) and listener(s). Peter Cooke has intuited that singing in cant by travellers is a form of joking. This is probably a correct interpretation, for as Frank Vallee also observed, "Tinkers operate in a shame rather than a guilt culture." (1955, p. 40) The function of cant songs may be to ridicule traveller values or heroes e.g., "Big Jimmie Drummond." (See ex. one.) Gaelic cant is also spoken by the Highland travellers though very little has been recorded. The following is a list of Scots cant songs recorded from 1974 - 1978 by the author:

1. O Bechts in the Gurie Cane wi a shan Jeerie; Cissie Johnstone, 76/222/A1.

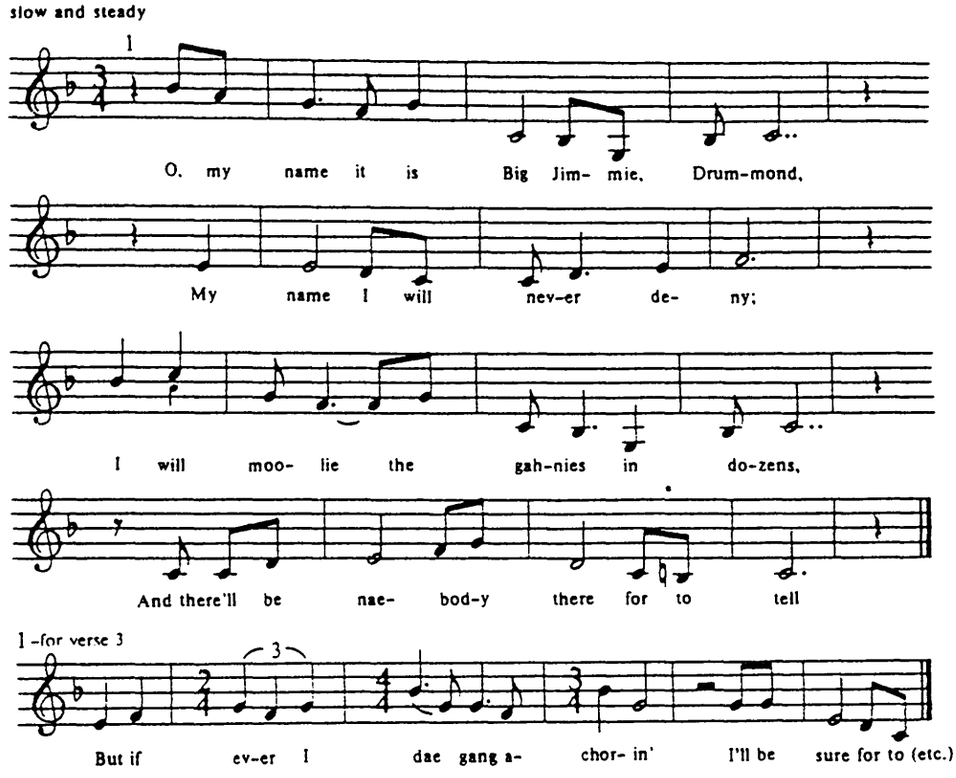
2. Blee-blaw Bubbly; Katie Johnstone, Bessie Whyte and Duncan Williamson, 77/143/A6.

3. Big Jimmie Drummond; Marion Townsley, 75/43/B12. Also sung by Isabelle and John Townsley and their children, 75/43/A5; John MacDonald, 75/98/A3; Mary MacDonald, 75/100/B2; and Duncan Williamson, 75/192/B3, 78/35/B4.

4. My wee Maggie; John Townsley, 75/42/B15. Also sung by Duncan Williamson, 78/107/B1.

5. Stall yir mangin, bing avree; tune diddled twice by Katie Johnstone, 75/99/B1.

Example 1. Willie McPhee, "Big Jimmie Drummond," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 296 - 297.



1 O, my name it is Big Jimmie Drummond,
My name I will never deny;
I will moolie the gahnies in dozens,
And there'll be naebody there for to tell.

2 O, last nicht I lay in a cauld granzie,
(Last nicht) I lay in the cauld gaol; (tonight?)
O, my mort and my kinshins are scattered,
And I dinna jan whaur they may be.

3 But if ever I dae gang a-chorin'
I'll be sure for to gang by mysel',
I will moolie these gahnies in dozens,
And there'll be naebody there for to tell.

Glossary

moolie	kill
gahnies	hens
granzie	barn, granary
mort	woman
kinshins	children
jan	know
chorin'	stealing

The main languages of the travellers are Scots and Gaelic. Their oral literature traverses the linguistic barrier between the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands e.g., Scots songs may be sung with partial Gaelic refrains and traditional Gaelic stories may be told in Scots.[5]

David Clement of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland has published a brief introductory study of the etymological problems presented by the Lowland cant. His prognosis for the travellers' cant is conceived from a non-traveller point of view: "When the travellers cease to be a distinct social group, one feels that their language will also disappear." (1981, p. 25) This assessment of the travellers' society is not appropriate for it is based on the presupposition that pressures from outwith traveller society are stronger than the forces of tradition from within.

The proper understanding of "traditional" in the context of oral narrative study was given by A.B. Lord who had concluded,

> Oral tells us "how," but traditional tells us "what," and even more, "of what kind" and "of what force." ....
> For it is of the necessary nature of tradition that it seek and maintain stability, that it preserve itself. And this tenacity springs neither from perverseness, nor from an abstract principle of absolute art, but from a desperately compelling conviction that what the tradition is preserving is the very means of attaining life and happiness.
>
> (1960, p. 220)

A close examination of travellers' own concepts about their tradition, especially as regards family histories, will reveal not only a positive outlook on the future of a travelling people, but also an unconquerable worldview. The evidence which has been gathered on the travellers' erudite subject of genealogy is a case in point. To begin with, the traveller concept of clan is hardy and explicit. Mrs Bessie Whyte, Angus traveller, has explained:

> Each different family is a different tribe, a different breed. Families kept together .... certain tinker families did not mix and the old travellers knew which families mixed without producing children who became lawbreakers.
>
> (73/161/A2 and 75/10/A3)

This testimony bears out the truth of Gentleman's statements on feuding and restrictive contacts between families. And, the converse of the pattern is also true: contacts between some area travellers were enduring e.g., between families in Argyll and Perthshire, and families in Inverness-shire and Perthshire. (Gentleman, 1971, p. 56)[6] According to Mrs Whyte, beliefs, physical features and personality traits of the different breeds were identifiable:

> The Johnstones and Townsleys [of Perthshire and Angus] did not eat hare, liver or shellfish — hare was enchanted [witches took their form] . Johnstones were big men but small in the hips and feet, and there was always one red-head in every family. The Whytes [of Aberdeenshire] were quiet folk. Some families were easily insulted [the Johnstones] .
>
> (BW, 75/12/A6, 75/107/B4, 75/150/A2, 75/191/A2)

Each breed has a nickname. Within traveller clans separate ancestral lines are distinguished by different nicknames. Descendants of the Kintyre Townsleys may be called either "Bubblies" or "Treacle," while the Perthshire Townsleys are nicknamed "Meal." Members of the Johnstone clan in Perthshire are either "Hens" or "Pigs." Nicknames or

by-names are conferred upon a family or person by (a) member(s) from another family. They are not only conferred upon separate families within a clan, but also upon individuals. And the tradition does not stop there: nicknames are also given to a family's homeground area and in this way some clans share the same by-name. "Meal" refers to all Forfarshire (Angus) families; Aberdeenshire travellers are known as "Breid and Milk;" "Breid and Jam" travellers come from Dunbartonshire; "Herring" from Argyllshire, and "Peats" from Skye.

Speaking a nickname is governed by strict rules. Personal by-names are never mentioned to the owner. Family by-names are mentioned for the express purpose of insulting the owner, the speaker indicating his superiority. This is taken by the owner as a challenge of strength and the only means of settlement is a fist fight. With delicacy and by careful inflection a family or homeground area nickname can be mentioned to an owner in jest — usually to reinforce friendship ties between the two different families or secure a friendly visit.

In general, the tradition is not as strictly observed today, though exceptions do exist, notably among some families and clans who live most of their days on the threshhold of violence e.g., some members of the McPhee clan. In the past, mention of words even associated with the nickname was interpreted as an insult and challenge to fight: speaking about nuts to an Aberdeenshire Whyte would have been offensive, they were nicknamed "Squirrels." Even the words of a non-traveller — with no knowledge of the tradition — could be deemed affronting if the words were even remotely associated with the nickname of a traveller who was in earshot. In some respects, the tradition is as strong as ever today. Some traveller sons are called by their

father's by-name e.g., "The Hedgehog." And in this way new branches of a clan are continually defined as personal nicknames become family by-names.

Nickname songs, composed by travellers about something actually said or done by a family or members of a family other than one's own, are numerous and a few have been recorded as natural in-context performances. The nickname singing tradition is not only private, like the travellers' singing in cant, but is also exclusive; only those songs with texts about families or members not in company are sung. When a nickname song is sung it never fails to elicit peals of laughter from the travellers, most of whom are singing along as well. The intent is usually to ridicule the owner(s). One exception is Duncan Williamson's composition, "The Nicknames." It is intended to rally travellers in company when sung. The tradition is objectified in this song as all travellers' nicknames are recalled. The following is a list of nickname songs recorded by the author from 1974 - 1977:

1. Gie the Craw Breid and Milk; Bessie Whyte, 74/244/B4, 75/99/B12.
2. The Molecatcher's Flittin; Bessie Whyte and Duncan Williamson, 77/139/B4; Bessie Whyte and Katie Johnstone, 75/99/A10.
3. The Nicknames; Duncan Williamson, 76/148/A3, 76/214/B2.

Opening his official report on the travelling people of Scotland, Gentleman stressed the strong group consciousness many travellers have and the pride some take in their way of life, despite the sufferings they have had to endure in order to retain it. (1971, p. 1) Closely linked with pride in themselves is the acute sense of nationalism many travellers have, notably the singers. The Scottish songs are felt to engender national consciousness:

> Anything in Scottish history at a song is sung it is absolutely true. Well, when you're singin it you can feel it, you fell it within yourself. When I'm singin I really feel that I'm singin history. History is Scotland. .... It is Scotland when you're singin the songs. .... Every country has got its traditional songs that they sing, but I really think that Scotland is the first, it is the best for the old songs.
>
> (Nellie Stewart, 78/103/A5)

Patriotism is also keen among the travellers as a group. They never forget the bravery and fortitude of their men who fought in two world wars to keep Britain free. Traveller Duncan Williamson's composition, "The Hawker's Lament," recalls the life-giving service of traveller men in World War II; it has been learned and sung by scores of travellers of every age group. Although this lament cries out on behalf of the travellers who are victims of misunderstanding, the song expresses at heart the common privilege, a basic freedom, all British citizens must appreciate.[7]

> Oh come all youse hawkers, you men of the road,
> Youse hawkers who wander around,
> My story it is sad, for it saddens my heart,
> For they've closed all our campin grounds down.
>
> Though we fought for we'r country and we fought for we'r king
> An some gave their life for this land,
> It's out there in Dunkirk it's many they fell
> With their blood mixed up with the sand.
>
> But what did they fight for and why did they die?
> For freedom to wander around!
> But where can we wander? We have no place to go,
> For they've closed all our campin grounds down.
>
> They say we are not wanted, to keep movin on,
> Though it be rain or be snow:
> For where can we move to when we move along,
> For we have got nowhere to go?
>
> So listen, my boys, if another war should come,
> Just you keep moving around:
> You have nothing to fight for, you have no house nor home,
> And they've closed all your campin grounds down.
>
> But maybe some day, when we've gone from this world
> An we're buried deep down in the ground,
> Will God make us welcome, will He give us a home,
> Or will He tell us just to keep movin on?
>
> (DW, 79/19/8)

Chapter One

THE TRAVELLERS' SINGING TRADITION

I. A "Singer" — Definitions

The concept of "good singer" is widespread among the travelling community, as may be inferred from the wide reputations within their own minority group of several travellers from disparate regions of Scotland who were and are considered "good singers": Johnnie Baxter of Ayrshire and the Borders (d.c. 1955), Jeannie Robertson of Aberdeenshire (d. 1975), Willie Townsley of Kintyre (d. 1983), Maggie Burke of Fife, Duncan Williamson of Argyllshire and Lizzie Higgins of Aberdeen. Jeannie Robertson commented during an interview by Herschel Gower, "Amongst my people there was fiddlers, accordion players, squeeze box players, mouth organ players, pipe players, and sometimes a lot of very good singers." (Gower, 1968, p. 118) Particular traveller families were noted for their singing prowess by travellers: "Whytes are famous for their voices;" (BW, 74/245/A8) "Jock and Hughie and them all [Whytes] , they were all good singers." (JW, 75/106/B1a)

The converse, that some travellers can't sing, is not easily verified. Jeannie Robertson had told Mr Gower, her people "who lived in the caravans and tents ....cuid all play — bagpipes, fiddles, accordions or mouth organs — they cuid all sing." (1968, p. 126) Was Jeannie referring to all travelling families as "my

people"? For it is not uncommon to find travellers who profess they "canna sing" e.g., Mrs Betsy MacDonald. (See MacColl, 1977, p. 20)[1] In this case "canna" should not be interpreted literally. Betsy has indeed sung and I have recorded her singing: 75/98/A4, 5. The truth would be more nearly approximated to describe Mrs MacDonald as a type of traveller singer who says "canna sing" but means "not able to sing well." If asked and encouraged by the right person, Betsy would sing, probably apologetically. Mr MacColl noted that ten of his eighteen traveller informants who sang did not "regard themselves as singers" and only sang because "they were merely the best that were to hand at the time" and "knew a version of a song that had been asked for ...." (1977, p. 20)

Honouring the request of the fieldworker is not inconsistent with the custom of performing within traveller society. When Johnnie Whyte explained to me during an interview, "Well, I mean if you sing a song often enough you're bound to ken't, ye ken, every word;" I asked, "But what makes you sing a song often?" He replied,

> Well, just the same as you would jist say to me, 'Will ye sing sic - 'n-sic ?' Mebbe, somebody mebbe twa or three days after that, mebbe some other body would jist say, mebbe say, 'Oh, I would like you to sing your mother's song sic - 'n-sic.' [sic = such]
>
> (78/107/A2)

It is in fact the repetition of requests for songs which had been sung by departed family members that gives a traveller the opportunity to fulfill a significant role as tradition bearer in his or her family. For a period of time immediately following the death of a loved one, at least a fortnight, the songs the departed was noted for singing would not be sung. But after the initial bereave-

ment period, upon request, a close relative or friend might oblige a listener with the singing of a song or songs the one who had died had sung.

Jeannie Robertson had also testified to the ritual of request at the "little sing-songs" when the Aberdeenshire travellers used to sit round the camp fires in the 1920s and 30s:

> I was askit to sing and of course I wad sing a few sangs what the people likit me to sing and it was the ballads that they askit. And some o the older people wad sing. And some o the ones aboot my age that was very guid at the auld sangs. That's how we passed the time.
>
> (Gower, 1968, p. 126)

Duncan Williamson has explained that many good singers among the travellers were known only by members of their own family group, their reputations for singing were not known by many different clans of travellers. They may be classed as "family singers" though they were not necessarily the favourite of all members of their respective families.[2] A family singer was rarely adept at more than one type of song, and his or her specialization in the "auld sangs" or "cowboy songs," for example (see chapter two), may not have appealed to every family member. Regardless of what type of song a family singer sang well, however, he or she <u>expected to be asked to sing</u>. (DW, Interview, 2/84)

A "traveller favourite," a singer who is deemed "good" by all travellers, is nonexistent. And the idea of a "queen of traditional singers," an ascription given to traveller Jeannie Robertson by Fred Woods and reiterated by Herschel Gower (1983, p. 26)[3], is illogical unless one is defining "traditional" outside the context of traveller society. There is no consensus among travellers on the criteria of good singing. Standards of excellence are not delimited. The "good

points" of singing, explained Duncan Williamson, pertained to a singer's being "good at such and such songs," when singers and song versions were discussed around camp fires. (Interview, 2/84) Nellie Stewart made a similar pronouncement, "Different types of songs were made for different types of singers and different voices." (75/198/A4)

Traveller criticism is characterized by an absence of experts within the community; there is no appeal to individuals with authoritative opinions on singing. And acclaim from critics or professionals outside traveller society is, from a traveller standpoint, no credit to a singer. Publication or recognition by the media does not make a singer "good" in traveller society. Most highly rated is the opinion given by a competent piper, singer or storyteller, a traveller who has gained knowledge firsthand, by experience. Yet it was not infrequently the case that a piper or singer who could play or sing well, would not know the tunes or auld sangs, would have a small or limited repertoire. Thus it happened that some travellers were given recognition by members of their group for their knowledge of material — songs, pipe tunes, stories — without being adept performers. A traveller, not necessarily a good singer, would be asked to sing when he or she knew songs, perhaps good versions of some.

For the purposes of this study two types of singers among the travelling community can be distinguished: those who were known for their singing of a certain type of song and were recognized for their singing primarily by their family or clan; and those who sang not as well as some, were ordinary singers and might have had good songs. The term "natural singer" may be used by some travellers

to refer to those members of their group who sang moderately well but were not especially proficient. Mrs Martha Johnstone's singing was described by singer Duncan Williamson and his definition is pertinent to the discussion:

> As far as the auld woman's singing went, I mean the auld woman was just a natural singer like ony other traveller woman .... she wasna better or nae worse, ken, she wasna worse or nae better than anybody else.
>
> (83/73/A)

Thus any traveller might be requested to sing, and in a get-together or "sprachnich" (see section two below), everyone participated or else they were instructed, "Tell a story, sing a sang, show your bum or out ye gang!"[4] The distinction between good and ordinary singers was not a concept of exclusion, but dependant upon an individual's propensity to respond to an audience. A good singer was expected by traveller audiences to treat their requests for songs with deference. A good singer's refusal to sing was interpreted as hostility, insulting behaviour and the violation of a social rite, the sharing of his or her songs.

The ordinary singer, however, was exempt from this responsiblity. Declining the request to sing was acceptable and caused no ill feelings, he or she could "please theirsel." (DW, Interview, 2/84) He or she was thus allowed a greater degree of participatory freedom. An ordinary singer could choose not to sing a narrative, opting to tell it, perhaps narrating only a part — without offending listeners. The narrative might then be critically discussed but would not be devalued on account of the performer's lower standard of singing, or a decision not to sing.

The author's use of the term "singer" is based on an open

concept of singing. Any attempt by a traveller at rendering a text, poem or story, or composition in song may be considered "singing." No distinction is made between good and poor or average singing. Any traveller who attempts to sing, any traveller who was reported to the author as having sung, may be termed "a singer."

II. Occasional Singing

The study of when and why travellers sing or have sung is germane to understanding their narrative singing, because originally narrative songs were not abstract art but integral to life, death and matters the travellers held to be of ultimate importance. Albert B. Lord's conclusions are apt:

> The roots of oral traditional narrative are not artistic but religious in the broadest sense. .... The traditional oral epic singer is not an artist; he is a seer. The patterns of thought that he has inherited came into being to serve not art but religion in its most basic sense.
>
> (1960, pp. 67, 220)

The two main occasions which reinforced the traveller individual's permanent place within his community were the reception immediately following his birth and his funeral. Birth reception and the post-funeral period of mourning have been defined by singing.

II.1. Birth

The celebration of birth was called "e'lightnin." It was a reception of drinking and singing to symbolically wet the baby's head, marking its entrance into light out of the darkness of the womb. Traditionally a child, especially a woman's first child, was born in the grandparents' tent where the woman's mother acted as midwife. Everyone related to the newborn and close friends outwith

the family were expected to attend on the evening of the birth, to hansel the baby with silver coins, and drink and sing until the first morning light. Songs of every type could be sung, but not ones with texts about death and suffering.

After the Second World War the tradition faded as more traveller children were born in hospitals and the knowledge of midwifery was not passed on to younger female members of a family. Why the attitude of the younger generation of postwar traveller mothers changed is a subject worthy of research, but it is sufficient to note that today they prefer doctors and nurses to the traditional "granny midwives." Now the e'lightnin ceremony has been supplanted with less ritualized social visits to welcome the newborn.

II.2. Death

The most important event in traveller life is death. Music plays an integral part in the funerals of many travellers who are led to the graveside by a traveller piper playing a lament. The piper is one singled out among many traveller pipers for his musical competence, and he is known as "a funeral piper."[5] The piping ritual at traveller funerals may be described as follows: once the hearse has arrived at the cemetery, the piper leads it and the procession -- members of family, the deceased's relations and friends following the hearse -- to the graveside playing "The Flooers of the Forest." Until the cortège has assembled around the grave the piper may continue playing. Only after he stops playing is the coffin lowered, by males who are the deceased's closest of kin. The piper does not play again -- as those attending the funeral disperse to the gate.

Today the graveside ritual, presided over by a minister from a

local church, is no different from West-European convention — throwing handfuls of earth on the coffin when the minister says, " .... from ashes to ashes, dust to dust ...." But in the past, before a minister or church official was called upon to preside over the burial, travellers would have buried their closest of kin with certain articles they believed the deceased would need — a tin cup, a piece of scone or bread and two or three silver coins. The belief was that the traveller would need a drink along the way into eternity, "the bread was to keep him going and the silver coins were to pay his way into eternity." (DW, Interview, 10/83) These articles do not accompany the dead now, but it may be noted that traveller pipers are buried with their pipes, a custom significant of the esteem with which travellers regard their pipers.

Members of the deceased's immediate family may spend weeks or months, perhaps years, in sorrowing over the loss of a loved one. Singing to a bereaved husband or wife is a strong tradition among the traveller community. While Gentleman had reported, "It is taboo to cry at a funeral or at any time after death," (1971, p. 58); the author, having attended six traveller funerals across Scotland to date, finds this statement untrue. The feeling of loss at a death is sometimes expressed by crying or wailing, and is acceptable behaviour at the graveside by a wife or women. At a later time, perhaps a fortnight after a funeral, listening to a traveller singer performing one of the deceased's favourite songs also incites a bereaved partner or family member to tears. The singer intends to show the bereaved partner that the memory of the dead one is alive and that in the song the spirit of the dead person lives on. The effect

of the performance is cathartic. The song provides a spiritual experience for both singer and listener. As the listener's response to the singer in crying causes a sympathetic reaction in the singer of deep emotion, the intensification of remembering, the live spirit is shared.

II.3. Marriage

Traditionally, marriage is not ceremonious among the traveller community. When two travellers make up their minds to live together and procreate (a woman's primary duty is to produce offspring and the travellers recognize their purpose in life is to procreate) they run away together, in cant -- "bing avrie the gurie." The distance actually "run" may be less than five miles. But marriages among travellers were never planned or arranged between families, in contradistinction to Gentleman's report, " .... arranged marriages within or between particular families are declining." (1971, p. 58) "Running away" is rationalized as a more lasting type of union than taking oaths in front of a registrar or minister. The traveller girl's line of reasoning is, "My Granny did it, my great-granny did it, why shouldn't I do it!" Runaway marriages of the traveller girl's ancestors never ended in divorce, and separation between spouses was rare, so she has good reason to follow suit. Some travellers today do plan their weddings and announce them; and a legal union at a registrar's office may take place shortly after elopement by those traveller couples who do not marry officially in a church. Formal receptions follow the planned weddings which are held in village hotels or dining halls. Singing, dancing and drinking make up the festivities; but only a very small percentage,

perhaps as few as five percent, of traveller marriages are formal and public.

III. Everyday Singing

III.1. Visiting

Singing may occur during the most common of traveller activities, the visit — the social pastime of meeting friends to "hae a crack" (discussing and conversing on topics of interest to both parties). Visits in which singing takes up more of the time than the crack, or conversation, and when travellers are more occupied with entertaining one another than with casual discourse, are defined by travellers as "sing-songs." Synonymous in many respects to the Gaelic word "céilidh" (visiting)[6], a sing-song is not usually prearranged but arises spontaneously without notice being given the host. The cant word "sprachnich" was used by traveller men or women when they met in towns or villages; it meant "get-together" at a later time in the evening after everyone had returned to camp and had had their tea.

According to singer Duncan Williamson, the psychological climate of a sing-song is essentially harmonious and those present who would wish to argue are curbed by others attending. (Interview, 2/84) But disagreement is certainly allowed; it is a lively part of the "crack" between performances of songs during the discussion and criticism of storytellers, singers and musicians. [crack = conversation]

Mr Willie McPhee, Perthshire traveller and funeral piper, made some distinctions between the modern traveller "ceilidh" and the sing-song during an interview in December 1983: the sing-song may

be a small gathering of two or three, whereas the "minimum for a ceilidh is six." Mr McPhee also made it clear that a sing-song could be held among members of a single household (a nuclear family living in a single tent or caravan) but the ceilidh featured a guest performer from outwith the household. See plates 1 and 2.

Mrs Martha Johnstone (also of Perthshire) did not use the terms "ceilidh" or "sing-song" but she had an equivalent concept, evident in the following discussion with Hamish Henderson. He had asked her,

> H — Tell us, would folk come in about and sing songs in the evening like, like at a, what you'd call a 'ceilidh' or anything o that sort?
>
> M — Just that. Just maybe getting a wee bottle o beer like you and having a jollification and the one would sing to the other.

(57/7)

III.2. Assimilating Songs in Childhood

The singing of songs, especially the old songs which had been sung by a family's forbears(see chapter two), featured prominently in the environment of traveller children — not for the sake of the song's survival, but as a permanent token of familial love, something a child would not forget.[7] Testimonies from travellers today in their fifties, sixties and seventies bear out this truth. The most common verbal response to the fieldworkers' queries about song sources was, "I heard that first when I was just a child." And often if a lack of continuity in the singing of some narratives was evident, singers would not hesitate to explain why they were incomplete or sung with hesitation — saying, "I never heard that since I was a child."

Apart from the deliberate occasions of being taught songs,

Plate 1. Singing occurs during the most common of traveller activities, the visit. Duncan Williamson sings "The Shepherd Lass" to Bessie Whyte and Katie Johnstone who remember the song as one of their mother's.

Plate 2. The ceilidh featured a guest performer from outwith the household. Duncan Williamson, from Argyllshire, is joined by the Stewarts and Whytes of Montrose as he sings a traditional song during a ceilidh (Montrose, 1978).

(discussed below) a child would have assimilated songs as part of everyday life. Mrs Logie MacQueen, an Angus traveller, explained why her daughters remembered parts of her narratives in 1975 she had since forgotten, "I used to sing all my bairns to sleep, bits of songs, not songs full out. As they grew up they learned the words. She [daughter Nellie] was interested in them." (75/105/A3)

III.2.1. Martha Johnstone's childhood. A traveller child's assimilation of songs depended on his or her interest in them. Mrs Martha Johnstone had explained to me in 1978 when I last visited her,

> You see, because the old songs — the people sung them, they were easy picked up, the young people easy picked them up, if you were willin to learn, ken? And I likit the old songs although I was young, little.
>
> (78/109/A3b)

It was integral to Martha's retention of the old songs that she had heard them sung at an early age. About "Sailor's Return" (Laws N42) Martha said in 1955, "Oh, I've haen that since I was a baby." (55/44) Her great-grandfather's song, "Banks of Airdrie" (CH 14), Martha showed to be of very early learning when she answered Hamish's question in 1957, "Ah, where'd you learn that one, who had it?" "Well, as long as I can mind, as long as I can mind I've heard that." (57/7) After singing "Lord Randal" (CH 12) in 1957 to Hamish, Martha told him she'd first heard it when she was a child, exclaiming, "It's just the auld yins, ye know, it's the ones that I heard when I was younger; I can mind o them, ye see!" (57/7)

Singing had been a feature of her environment as she explained to Hamish Henderson in 1957, after he had asked her where she had heard "Sir James the Rose" (CH 213):

> H — Was that up Aberfeldy way when you heard that one, where abouts was it, Aberfeldy was it?

M -- Well it was, it was my grandfather I heard at that one.

H -- Oh aye.

M -- He was an awfae man tae sing that one.

H -- When would he sing, like, would he sing in the evening? Where abouts would he sing?

M -- He would sing tae hissel, ye ken, he wis . . . evenings an that. We used tae aye be sittin aside him, ye ken, when I was little, like! Ye see, we were aye together some way and we'd aye hear the auld yins singing. And then we picked em up better because there was nane o this music now, there were none o these musics like tae we hae . . . onything that we did pickit was off the older people because we had nae wirelesses, no gramaphones, nothing like that! And we just had tae amuse wirsels wi wir own songs. Ye see? .... That was the way it was.

(57/7)

The singers in Martha's childhood from whom she learned songs are discussed in appendix B. Here it may be noted that her great-grandfather, David Whyte of Aberdeenshire, influenced Martha's early musical development more than any other individual. Her enjoyment of singing was assimilated from his, as she described this to Hamish:

> Yes, of course he was an awfae man for singing, singing, singing. And ye ken, when I was little I just sat beside him, ye ken, listening tae him and I pickit them up. Of course I lost a lot. Aw, I had lots and lots and I used to sing them when I was little.

(MJ, 57/7)

III.2.2. Mary Williamson's childhood. In some families fathers and grandfathers were the dominant figures in homelife. Until the middle of this century when motorized vehicles came to the fore and supplanted the travellers' preoccupation with craftwork, usually carried out at home, a typical working day for some traveller men had been sitting at camp weaving baskets, making leather bootlaces, heather besoms and scrubbers, making tin jugs or repairing tin articles. The women then bartered the hand-made wares for food or

hawked them round the houses in villages or on farms. Thus the children of these travellers, like Mary, were reared mainly by their fathers and grandfathers (or great-grandfathers) and it is not surprising to hear singers attributing their narrative songs, frequently heard sung in their childhood, specifically to paternal rather than to maternal forbears. "He [my father] was a good singer of old songs. He learned them from his father -- not his mother." (Mary Williamson, 76/204/B5)

Mr Charlie Townsley of Campbeltown was Mary Williamson's grandfather, one of the Kintyre Townsleys, a large extended family who did not travel north of Lochgilphead.[8] For long periods during winter, September to March, and for shorter periods during summer, perhaps a week, as many as ten nuclear families would return to camp together on Campbeltown Moss, where many members of the extended family of traveller Townsleys were born.

> There was a big crowd of people -- Granny, Grandfather, uncles and aunts. The camps [summer bow tents] were open at the front .... placed or built in a big ring, nine or ten families with one master fire in the centre. Every night they would sit up till one or two o'clock in the morning baking scones, bannocks and soup.
>
> (MW, 76/64/A1, 2)

During these gatherings narratives were told and sung.

In the summer the group dispersed often, families went separate ways to earn their living. The men would have been more active away from home, playing pipes for tourists or taking temporary employment thinning turnips on farms. Mary's father and mother stayed regularly on or near farms in Clachan, Kintyre. In the evenings, summer and winter, after the day's work Mary said her father had "sung to her and her brothers and sisters when he got drunk." (76/64/A1) Then he would repeat his favourite songs, for

example, "Lady Margaret" (CH 7, 75/131/B3, 76/64/A1) and "Three Pretty Sisters"(CH 14, ex. 1, Conclusion).

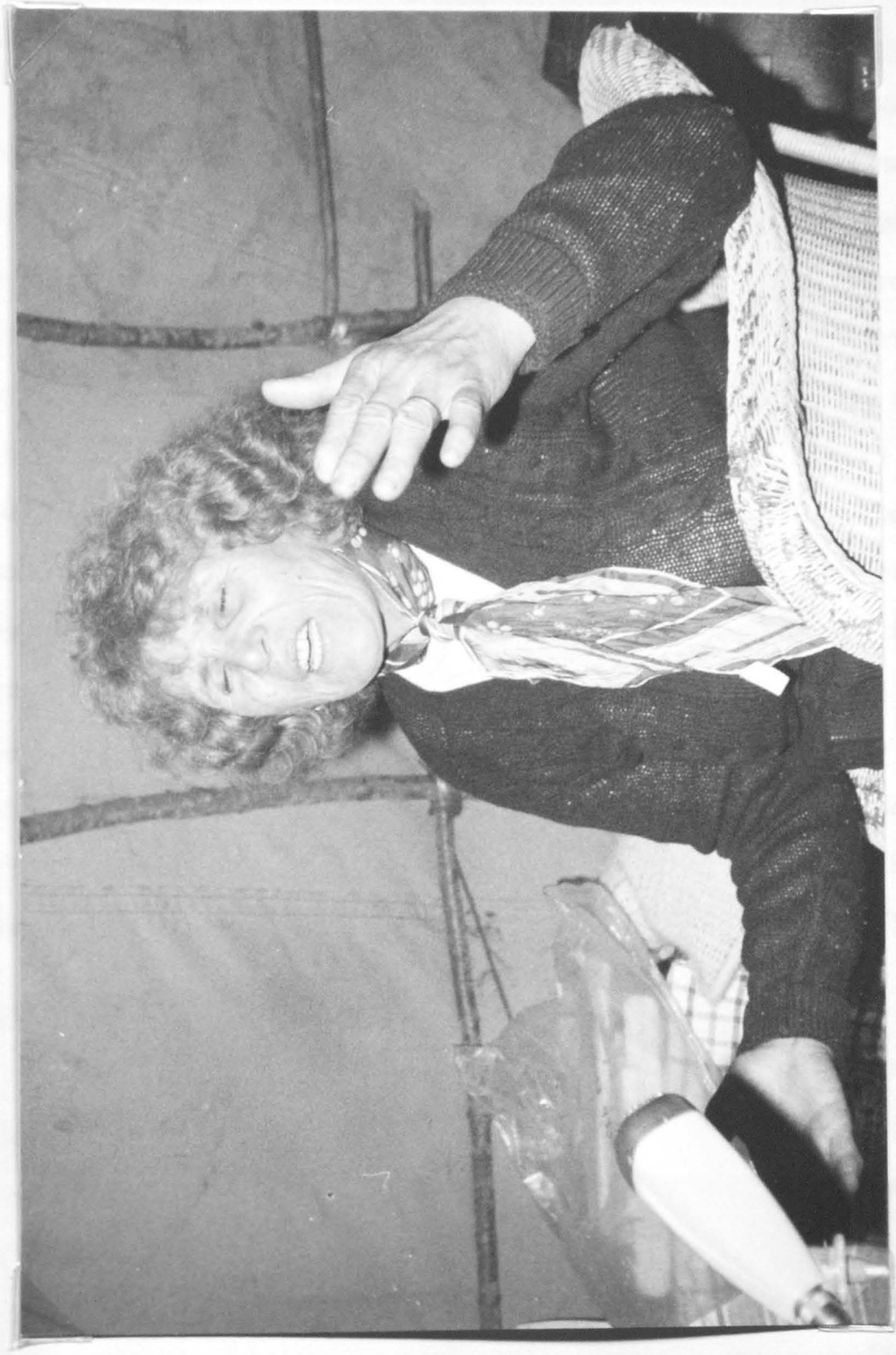


Plate 3. Mary Williamson sings her father's favourite "Three Pretty Sisters" for me in the gelly, Lingerton, Lochgilphead, Argyll. June, 1977.

IV. The Functions of Singing

IV. 1. In Private, Remembering a Song Consciously or Subconsciously

Singing to ones-self is done, according to Duncan Williamson, "for the sake of keeping up the song," for remembering and practicing it. (Interview, 10/83) This kind of private singing is undoubtedly a conscious activity. But most testimonies recorded from travellers about singing to themselves reveal a partly subconscious function of private singing. Nellie Stewart has said, "I have a song to myself when I feel like it." (78/103/A5) Clearly perceived reasons for singing to ones-self are seldom given. In private, usually during the course of menial tasks, partially forgotten songs and narratives can be entirely recalled -- and the process of remembering is not willful. Martha Johnstone had explained how she recalled old songs while alone at her domestic chores, songs that were otherwise difficult or impossible to remember consciously in a recording session: "The only way that I mind . . . if I'm daein anything in the hoose here they all come into my heid when I'm here masel." (PS 67/3)

IV.2. Bringing back Memories of Forbears

After the day's work was finished and families had had their tea, narrative songs were sung by travellers often for the express purpose of bringing back positively affective memories "of their father and mother before them [who had] sung that song." (BW, 77/202/B1) A singer of old songs and traditional traveller narratives in particular, Duncan Williamson had explained to his traveller audience during a ceilidh (see Willie McPhee's definition above, p. 28) in 1977,

> I try to rack my heart and get as much feelin in it [an old song] ; tryin to produce my mother and father there . . . and make it just as [we] were then. When I'm singing I'm still with them.
>
> (77/202/B3)

Duncan had asked his audience on this occasion, "What made the old folk [travellers] greet when they heard an old song?" after having sung "Down in Yonder Bushes." (See ex. 1.) Bryce Whyte [greet = cry] replied,

> It's the simplest thing in the world .... at the New Year time it is the same with myself, tears come to my eyes because I can see my father sittin in that chair, rockin back and forward; can hear his voice, can see his smilin face. It's the people not the song.
>
> (77/202/B1)

Bryce then added that 'when he sings a song of his mother's he does not sing to his audience, he sings to his mother' — "I can see her in front of me." (77/202/B1) After his wife Bessie had sung a phonetically remembered Gaelic song together with her cousin during this ceilidh, Bryce confirmed his answer to Duncan's question, referring to their Gaelic singing, "When youse is singing that song I bet youse is thinkin about your ain folk. Well, that's what singing's aboot." (77/202/B3)

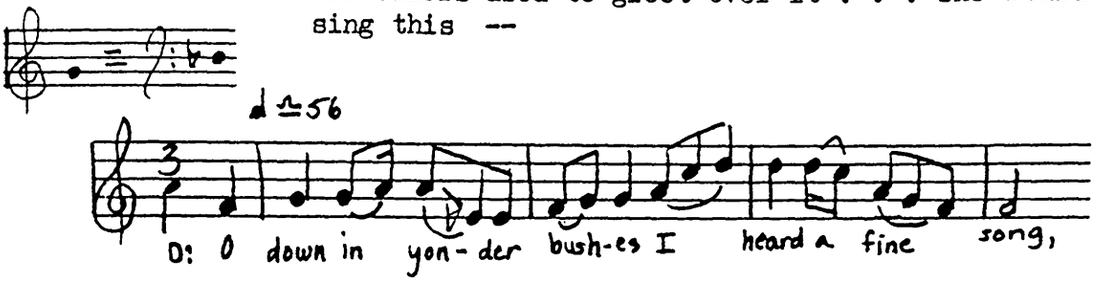
Traveller listeners in a traveller ceilidh may not necessarily experience the same psychological state of the traveller singer — who reproduces the song as closely as possible to the way it had been sung by his source singer — but the singing may stimulate a comparable affection in the listener's rememberance of loved ones lost who had sung the same song or liked it. Bryce explained:

> It is not [my brother] Johnnie's voice which appeals to me so much [when he sings the old songs] , but rather the thought that Mother and Father sang that way.
>
> (77/202/B3)

During the first six months of Bessie Whyte's acquaintance with Duncan Williamson, of an Argyllshire traveller family from a part of Scotland distant to Bessie's homeland of Angus, whenever Duncan sang old songs she knew but in most cases had not heard since she was a child, Bessie would respond sincerely with comments such as, "Every song Duncan sings my mother used to, and I am moved hearing them again." (76/215/B2)

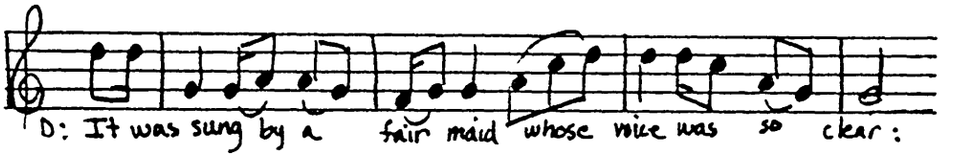
Example 1. Duncan Williamson, Katie Johnstone, Bessie Whyte, Bryce Whyte; "Down in Yonder Bushes," complete performance, 76/73/B9.

D — I'll sing ye . . . when your mother was peevie [drunk] she would sing this and all the travellers used to greet over it . . . she would sing this —

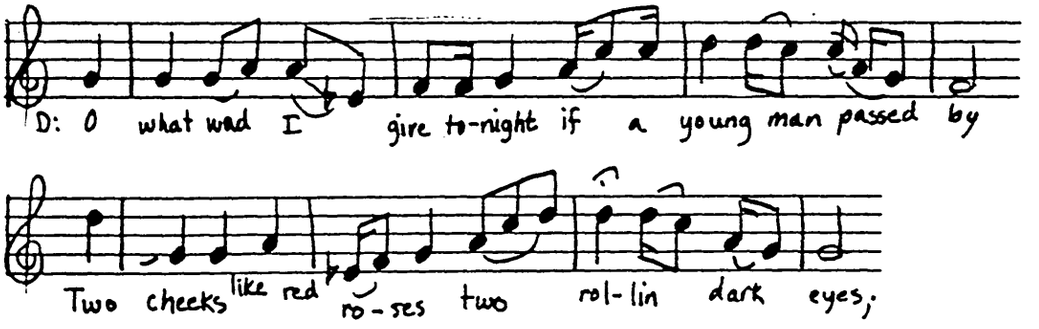


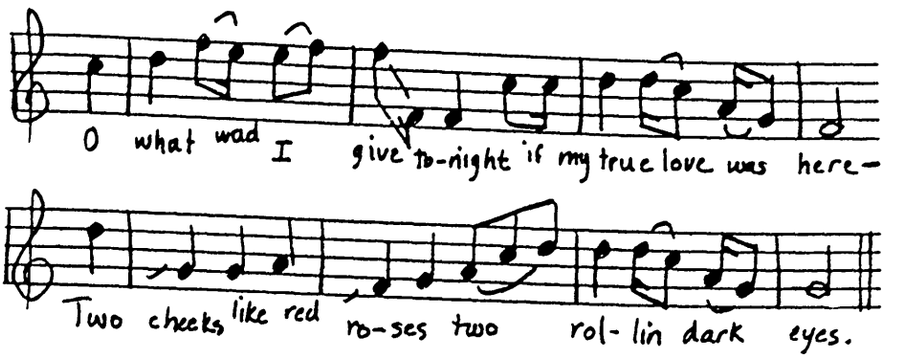
K: My mother's sang too.

B: Aye.



K: I remember it was ma mother's sang . . . ye must have been a Burke too.





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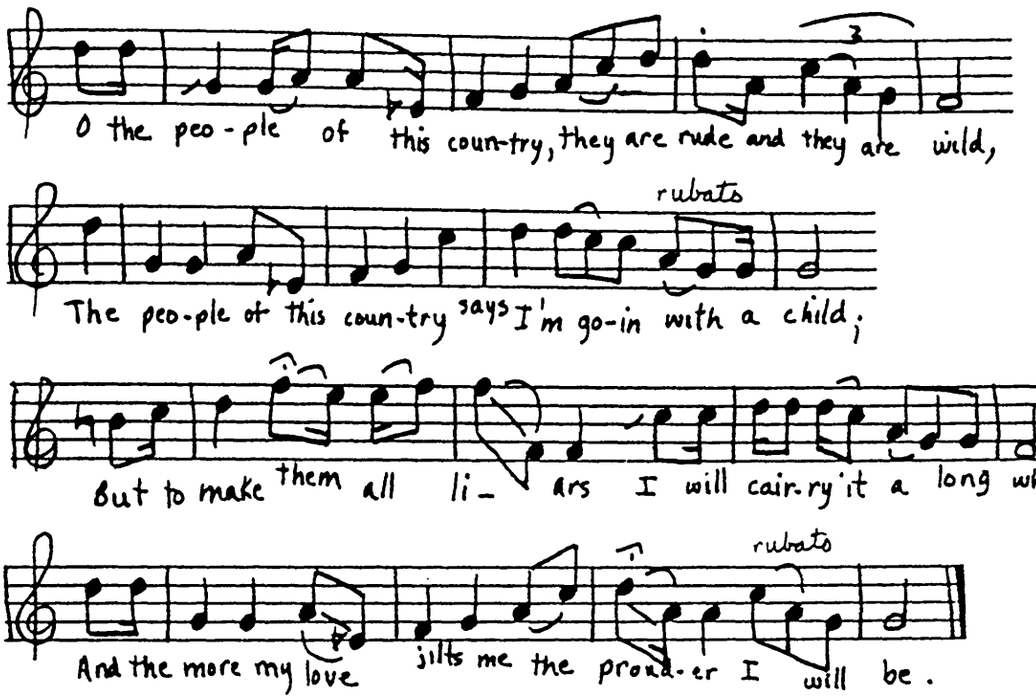


Br: Good, Duncan!

Bes: Ye ken this Duncan, that's the very song my mother aye sung.

IV.3. Arguing in Song

A function of singing which has not been recorded in its natural context is the use of songs for arguing. Music is an affective art and among the travellers, singing is generally associated with the expression of feeling. Emotionality in song could have been exploited by travellers. Mrs Whyte has explained that her mother,

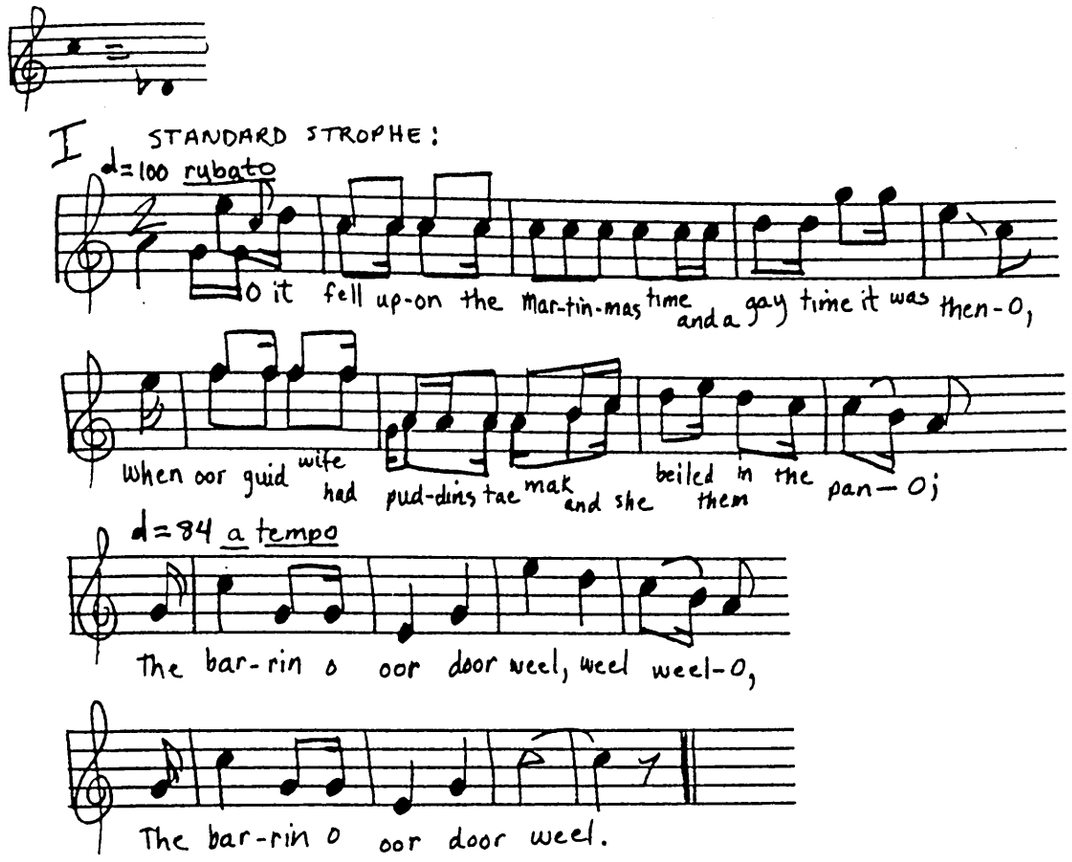
> had different songs for different moods. .... It was time for a song when she was happy, time for a song when she was sad and time for a song when she was angry. There was a song for every different moment .... She made up bits and added them to existing songs. Men and women often sang instead of speaking to each other especially when angry.
>
> (75/190/A2 and Interview, 10/76)

After Bessie had sung ten verses of "Barrin o Oor Door" (CH 275) in 1975, she said, "Mother and Father would sometimes put their ain words into it, according to what they were wantin tae say at the time bein." (75/190/A4) An example of what Bessie's mother and father might have said to each other in singing during an argument was recorded from her in the summer of 1984, after a performance and discussion of the "Barrin o Oor Door" for traveller friends and the author. (See the end of ex. 2 below, p. 43.)

IV.4. Competing in Wittiness

A very common function of singing was competing in song, improvising on text lines to show superiority in wit. An example of this playful sport was recorded from Duncan Williamson and Bessie Whyte after her performance of Child 275, at the request of the author. See ex. 2, pp. 40 - 43.

Example 2. Bessie Whyte, Duncan Williamson, Linda Williamson, Bryce Whyte, "Barrin o Oor Door," song and follow-up discussion, 84/41/A1.



2 The wind got up fae north tae south and blew across the floor-O,
Says oor guid man tae oor guid wife, get up and bar the door-O;
The barrin o oor door weel, weel, weel,
The barrin o oor door weel.

3 Ma hand is in ma hoosewife's skirt —
[spoken:] Ye can imagine what the travellers would put to that!
[phrase one resumed:] guid man as you can see-O,
Should it no be barred this hunderd year, it'll no be barred by me-O;

The barrin o oor door weel, weel, weel,
The barrin o oor door weel.

4 So they made a pact atween them twa, they made it firm and share-O,
That war'er wad spark the foremost word would rise and bar the door-O;

The barrin ....

5 Noo along there cam twa gentlemen at twelve o'clock at night-O,
But they could see nae hoose, nae ha, nae coal, nae candlelight-O;
The barrin ....

6 O whither is this a richman's hoose or whither is it a poor-O?
But ne'er a word did ony o them speak for the barrin o the door-O;
The barrin ....

7 Noo first they ate the white puddins and then they ate the black-O,
And muckle thought the guid auld wife yet ne'er a word she spak-O;
The barrin ....

8 Says the yin untae the tother yin, here man tak ma knife-O,
And you cut aff the auld man's beard and I'll kiss the guid wife-O;
The barrin ....

9 [This verse sung after the performance as a missed stanza:]
But there is nae water in the hoose and what will we do then-O?
What ails ye at the puddin bray that's beilin in the pan-O?
The barrin ....

10 And up then jentit oor guid man and an angry man was he-O,
Tae kess ma wife afore ma face an scad me wi the bree-O!
The barrin ....

11 Then up and jumpit oor guid wife, gied three skips roond the floor-O,
Guid man ye've spoken the foremost word, ye can gang and bar the door-O!
The barrin ....

[spoken:] That's it!

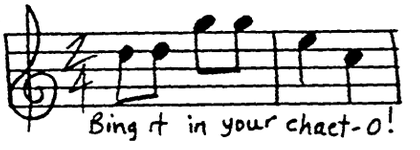
....

B — .... but that was the words as I'd heard them and any words that the travellers put in was maistly bawdy chat.

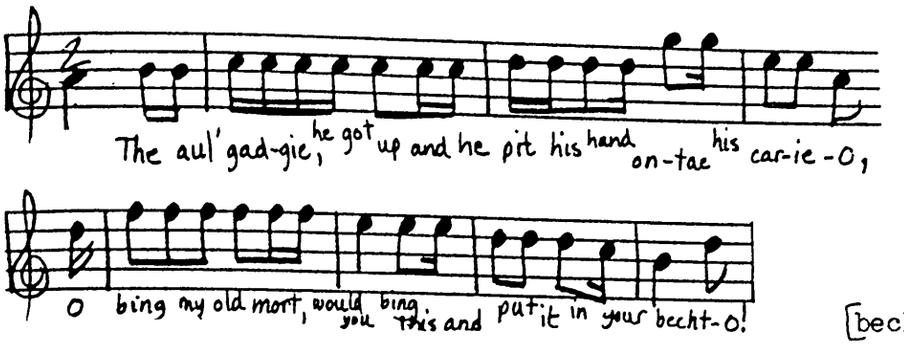
....

D — Ye see, Linda, the travellers .... if somebody would sing the 'Barrin o the Door,' te let ye understand, te get through te ye, and then the travellers said, 'that was a nice song.' So then they would go and they say how <u>they</u> would sing the 'Barrin o the Door' in traveller language. And the auld man would say, they would make a part that wasnae in the song and repeat and make a shan bit or a bad bit just for a, for a, for fun! For a laugh.

B — Aye, probably in cant. [sings:]



D — I'll gie you a coinc'dent [sings:]



[carie = penis]

[becht = vagina]

L — Aye!

Br — [laughing]

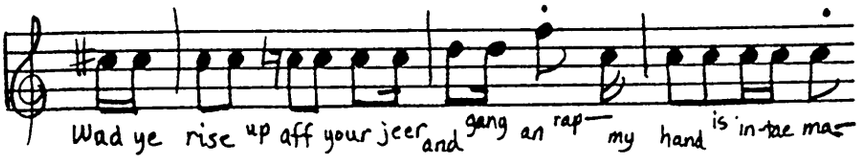
B — Aye!

D — This is the kind o thing—

Br — that could have happened.

D — This is the kind o things that happened!

B — Aye, or [sings:]



[gesture] ye ken!

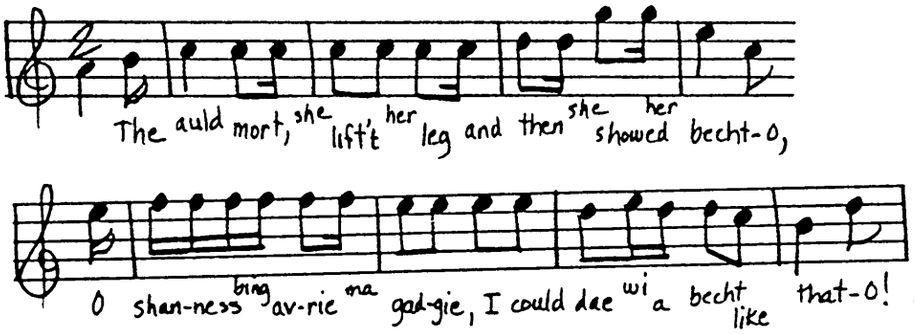
[jeer = backside]

And right oots and they wad say 't that way!

D — And this went on for hoor and hoor. And some other traveller roond the fire would say, he had another bit —

B — Katie, Katie would be good at tellin ye aa things, bits like that.

D — Here would be another bit [sings:]



Br — Oho [laughing]

B — Aye!

D — These are the kinds o things they made. .... They made their <u>own</u> ideas o the 'Barrin o Our Door.'

B — And other songs as well.

D — No as part o the song, but they had it in fun.

Br — That's right.

D — Well, everybody took part and you were interested when somebody made something new.

L — But they would be interested in the straight way as well?

B — Oh aye.

D — Of course they would.

Br — Aye, they werenae makin a fool o the song or nothing.

B, Br — No.

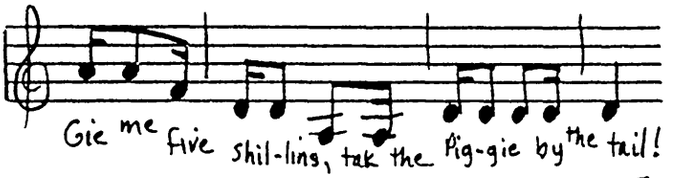
D — Bessie, they were ony makin a comic version o the song, no disregard tae the song. .... Tae keep the thing goin.

Br — Just for a laugh, that's right, aye.

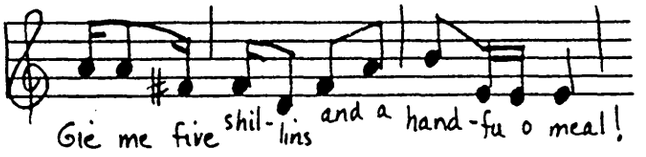
D — And them that made the queerest thing and said the funniest thing and the ugliest thing and then maybe, prob'ly the dirtiest thing was the person who had done the best job.

Br — That's right, aye. That's right, aye.

B — Ye!. Well, I seen my father and mother maybe arguin wi one another, ye see, and they were arguin aboot money this mornin. And he startit tae sing . . . ye ken my mother's real nickname's 'The Guffies' — Mother. He says [sings:]



And quick as lightnin she cam oot wi, [sings:]



They were cried 'The Meals,' ye see! Townsleys was 'The Meals'. So, they couldnae dae nothin then but laugh at each other. They forgot about the fight and argument. They were that quick on their answer.

D — The Johnstones were really good at that. They were quick-witted.

IV.5. Teaching Songs

The teaching of songs by singing to children and interested listeners was a deliberate activity by some travellers. Mrs Martha Johnstone made an effort to teach her grandchildren her old songs but she was not optimistic about holding their attention. When I first visited her in 1975 she told me she had been trying to teach her youngest son's children, who were living in the same house with her, "The Golden Vanity" (CH. 286). After singing it she explained why she thought they were not interested in the song. "Aye, I was trying to learn the wee yins but they would rather hae something . . . they see too much o this carry-on on the television." (MJ, 75/197/B1)

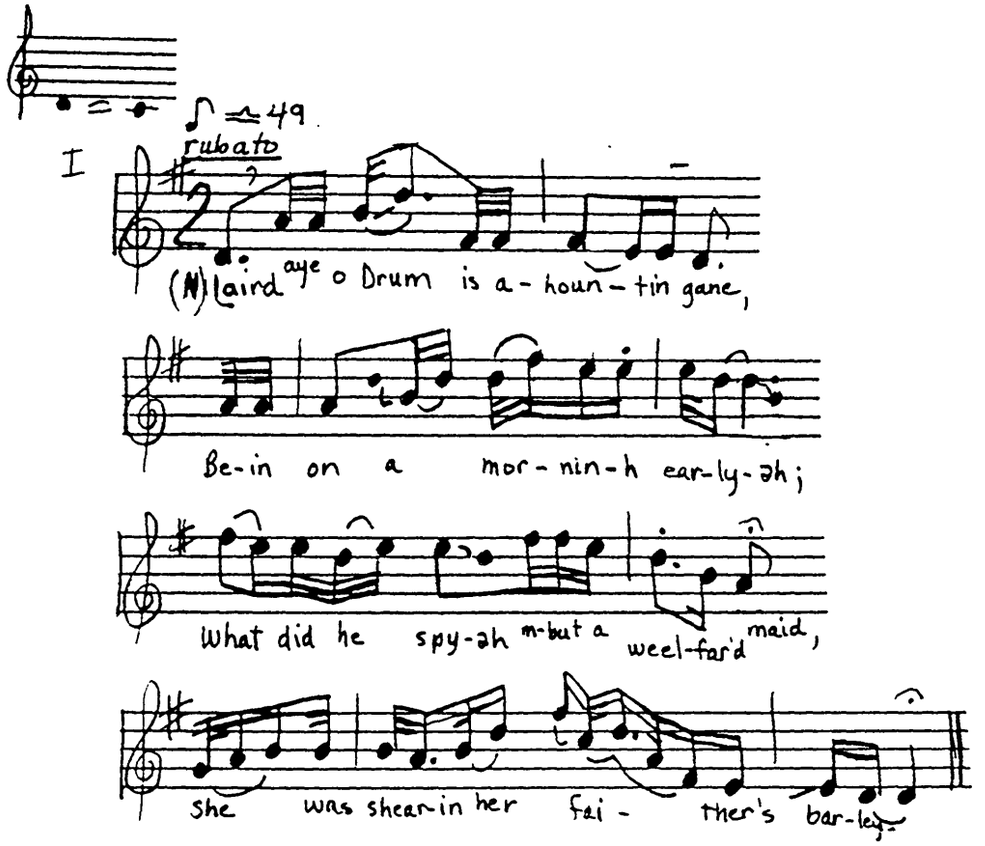
Mrs Nellie Stewart, of the North-East, attributed nearly all of her narrative songs (ten recorded) to Jean Stewart, her mother-in-law, who had taught her the old songs.

> Really I learned a lot of songs . . . my mother-in-law . . . she had a lot of Scottish songs. She was a really, a good old ballad singer. She learned us a lot. I picked up a lot of songs from her, nearly every one I know, 'The Laird o Drum,' .... Old Jean Stewart from Buchan, when she was young she came up here [Banchory]. I wasn't very old when she learned me a puckle songs, about seventeen. She knew that I was interested in singin and she said to me, 'You really like the old songs.' I said, 'Yes.' Well maybe she would sing a song for me. And I would say, 'I'd like to learn that one.' And then she would write them down for me, and then she says, 'Now you can learn them yourself.' She would give me the tone, the air, the tune of them.
>
> (NS, 75/130/B1)

It can be inferred from Nellie Stewart's highly stylized verbal production in narrative singing that the exact transmission of words from one singer to another in the Stewart family of the North-East was important. Yet the pervasive vocalic element — in the articulation of consonantal word-endings, the use of nasals as continuants and supplementary syllables — certainly doesn't stem from a

written form of text transmission. It is fairly evident from Nellie's laboured delivery of words in "The Laird of Drum," see ex. 3, that her teacher's <u>singing</u> of the song would have been necessary to ensure transmission of its characteristic sound. This "sound" could not have been learned from print; it is partly derived from the music of the pipes and especially <u>canntaireachd</u>. The great influence of pipe music on narrative singing has been studied in detail in the performances of traveller Lizzie Higgins.[9] Nellie's singing style is comparable. See ex. 3.

Example three. Nellie Stewart, "Laird o Drum," 78/105/B3; detailed transcription showing supplementary syllables, continuants (nasals) and the vocalic element. CS



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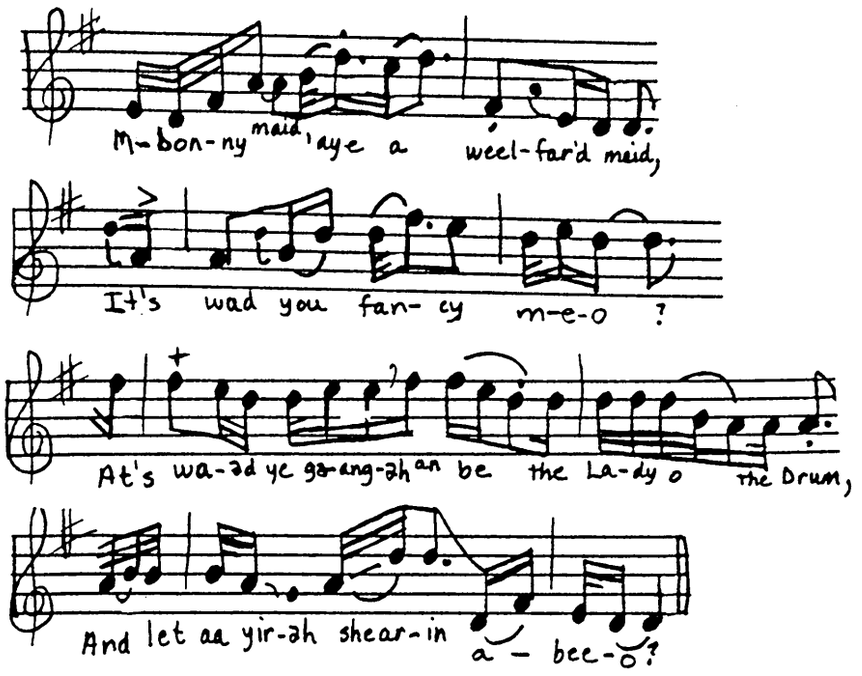
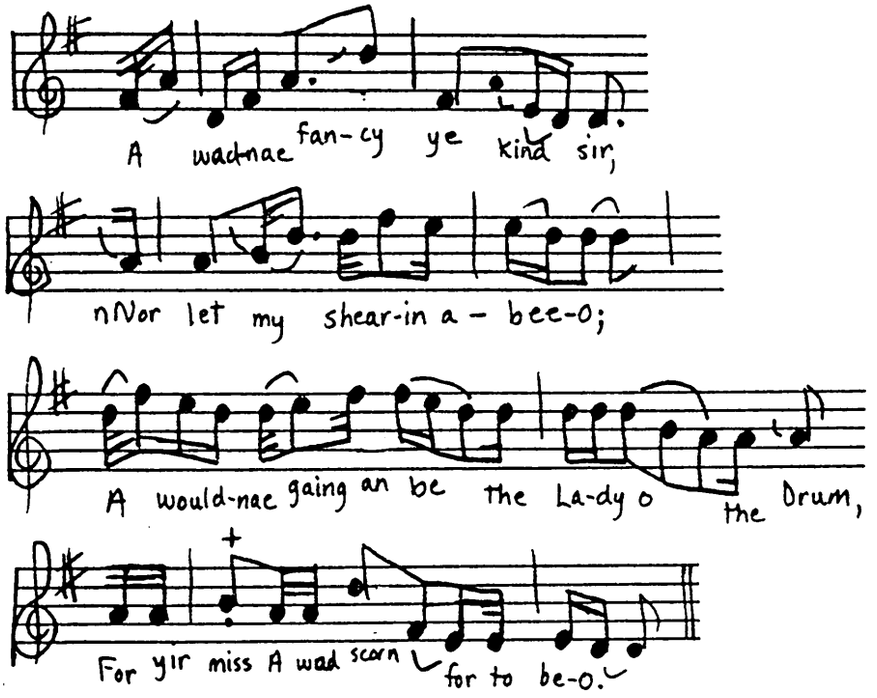
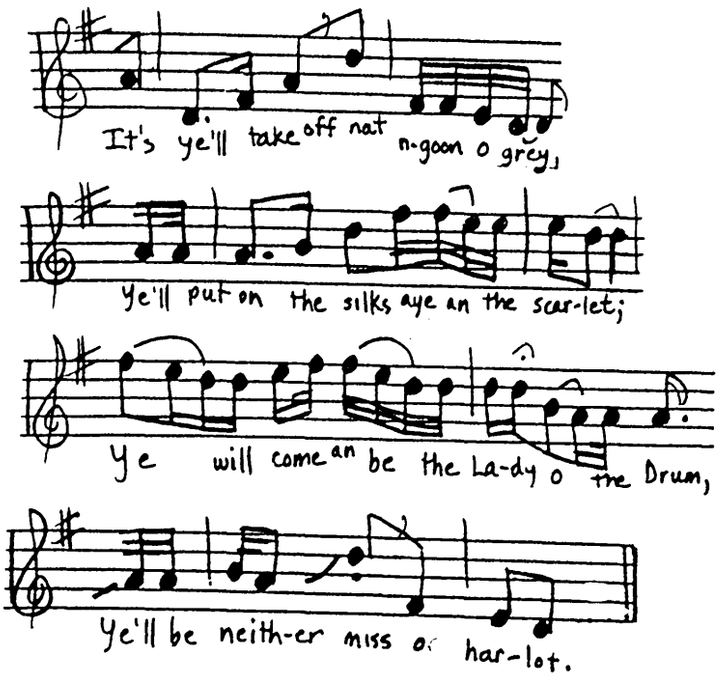

M-bon-ny maid 'aye a weel-far'd maid,
It's wad you fan-cy m-e-o ?
At's wa-ad ye ga-ang-ah an be the La-dy o the Drum,
And let aa yir-ah shear-in a - bee-o?

III


A wadnae fan-cy ye kind sir,
nNor let my shear-in a - bee-o;
A would-nae gaing an be the La-dy o the Drum,
For yir miss A wad scorn for to be-o.

IV



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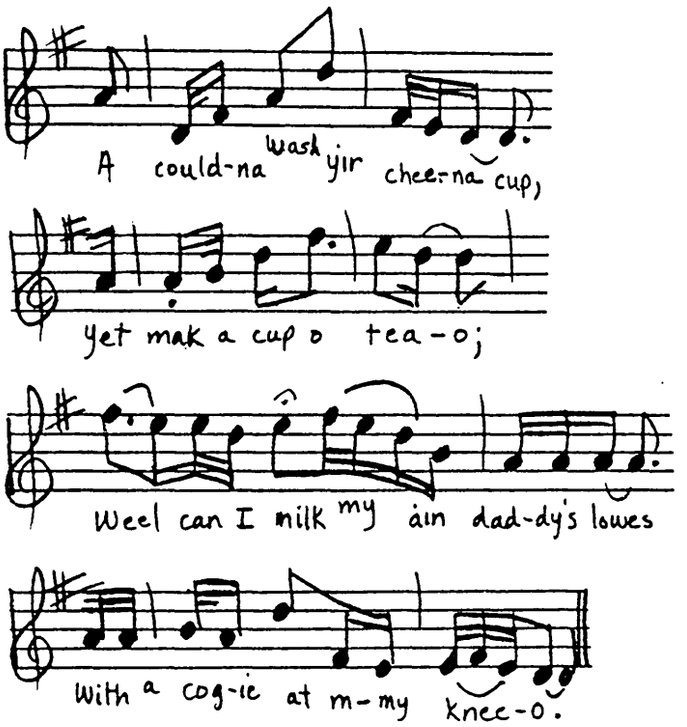
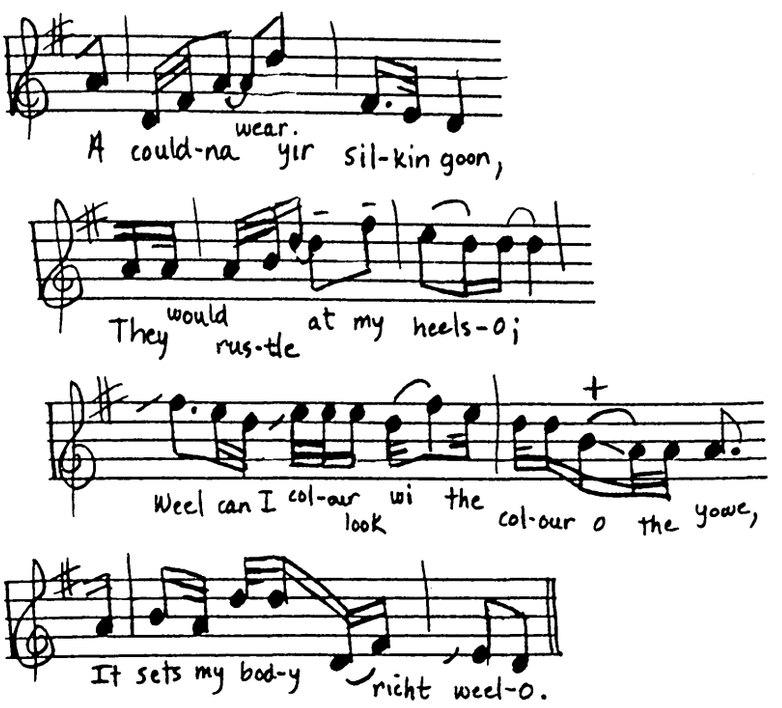
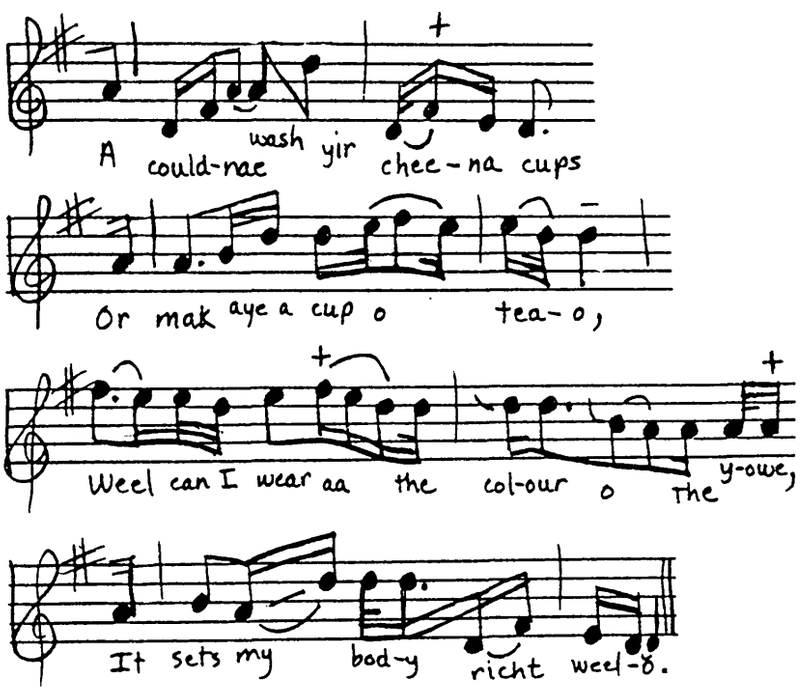


[cogie = lamb]

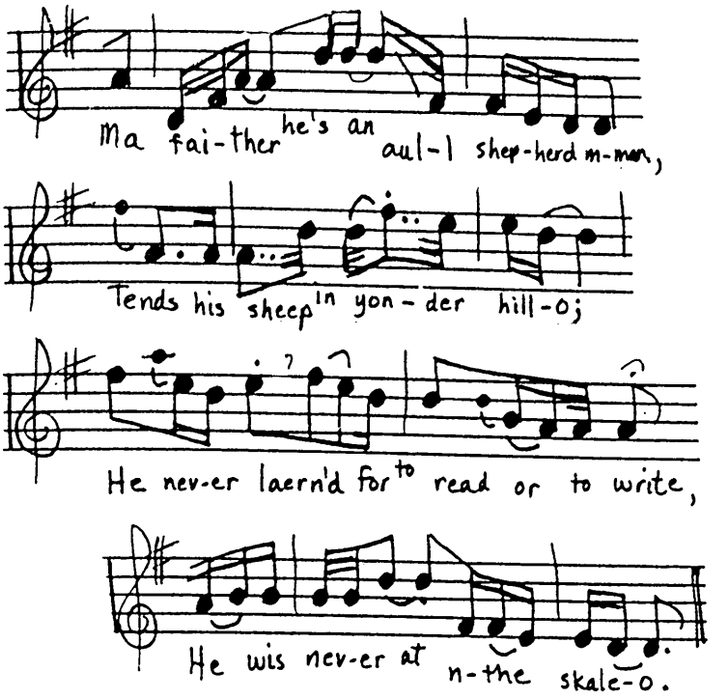
VI


A could-na wear. yir sil-kin goon,
They would rus-tle at my heels-o;
Weel can I col-our look wi the col-our o the yowe,
It sets my bod-y richt weel-o.

VII


A could-nae wash yir chee-na cups
Or mak aye a cup o tea-o,
Weel can I wear aa the col-our o The y-owe,
It sets my bod-y richt weel-o.

VIII


Ma fai-ther he's an aul-l shep-herd m-man,
Tends his sheep in yon-der hill-o;
He nev-er laern'd for to read or to write,
He wis nev-er at n-the skale-o.

IX

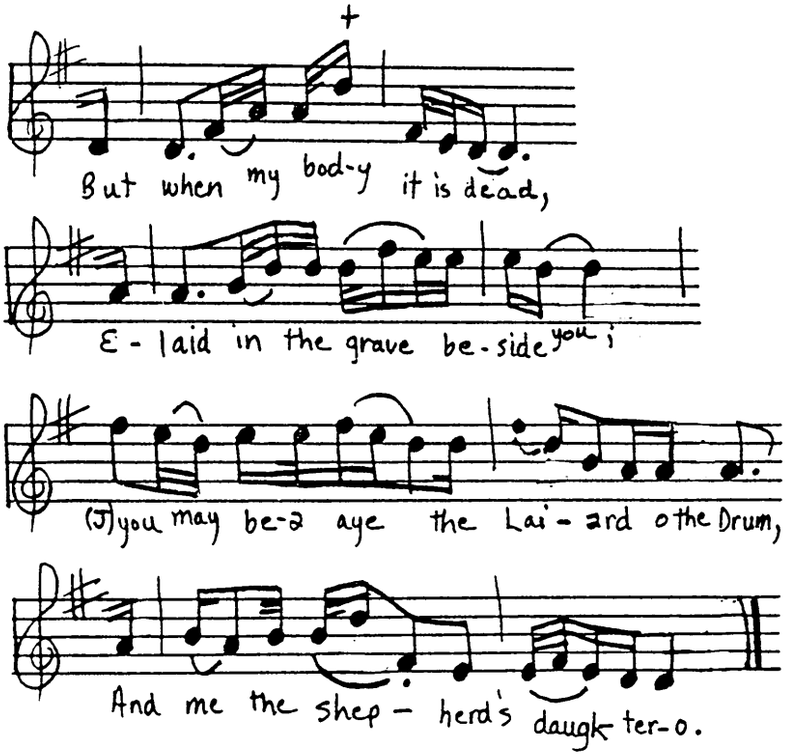

But when my bod-y it is dead,
E-laid in the grave be-side you;
(J)you may be-a aye the Lai-ard o the Drum,
And me the shep-herd's daugh-ter-o.

Plate 4. Nellie Stewart sings a narrative dramatically. Blackhall, Banchory; June, 1978.

Plate 5. Mr and Mrs Tommie and Nellie Stewart, Blackhall, Banchory. June, 1978.

IV.6. Cheering Workers

An obvious use of singing by travellers is to accompany their work, particularly while they labour at their many different agricultural jobs e.g., spreading dung, pulling flax, thinning turnips, picking berries, gathering potatoes and planting them. These jobs require continuously repetitive hand and body movements and provide little mental challenge. Singing thus helps keep the mind agile, relieving some of the boredom.

Mrs Bessie Whyte has remembered her childhood years in the most sensitive and truthful account we have of traveller life in her own writing, The Yellow on the Broom (1978). As an adult, Mrs Whyte has spent the majority of her years as a housed traveller working on farms in Angus. Farm work for her and many travellers is not drudgery, though it is hard and laborious.

> You are free to let yourself go, to feel yourself. Being close to the land brings you out of yourself. You are a different person, you feel different all together from being inside [a house] . You feel that good you want to sing.
>
> (BW, Interview, 10/76)

The songs Bessie would sing on the fields were humorous traveller-made songs, bawdry and short rhythmic Gaelic songs her mother had also sung while doing farm work. "Mother was always singing .... she would keep time tae the music wi whatever she was doin." (BW, 75/150/B5) The purpose of singing was to entertain workmates, to eradicate thoughts of long working hours with cheery, light-hearted songs. No recordings of travellers singing while working have been made, and there is scope for research on the subject.

IV.7 Earning an Income

Music-making has often been a means to an end for travellers, serving some purpose outside the art of love of manipulating sounds for their own sakes. One specifically traveller female occupation was "singing the hooses" for money. Not many traveller women are known for having supplemented family incomes by singing for villagers at the front doors of houses, or for townsfolk in closes at the backs of houses. But Katie McCallum of Stirling is remembered by some travellers for her songs and having 'sung the houses' in the early 1920s. Mrs Martha Johnstone's youngest son, Jack Reid, who stayed with his mother all her life, testified that she had sung the hooses as a young adult in the 1920s and 30s, when she would have sung "Silver Threads among the Gold" (77/146/A4), and "Flow Gently Sweet Afton." (Interview, 11/83)

The richness and vastness of the travellers' Scottish heritage in song was brought to the attention of the public at large during the 1960s when exponents of the singing tradition — Jeannie Robertson, Donald Higgins, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie and Davie Stewart — performed as guest artists at organized concerts held in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. These events were part of the folk music revival, a phenomenon described recently in detail by Mrs Ailie Munro, The Folk Music Revival in Scotland (1984).

But before the revival, the one public outlet for the travellers' music-making was busking — street-singing for money. Not only singing, but also fiddling, spoon and bone playing (rattling polished ham bones between the fingers); playing the mouthorgan, melodeon, banjo, concertina and occasionally the accordion by travellers was

a means of their earning a few shillings. Mouth organ players also "played the houses" in the same way as the women sang them. Busking was done in small villages as well as in large towns wherever numbers of people were standing, usually in queues at picture halls, bus stops and train stations. Ferry depots were another favourite place. Pubs, depending on the inclination of the individual publican, hotel entrances and bothies were frequented by traveller men buskers; but women were not excluded from the other locales. Songs sung were comic songs, war songs, bothy ballads and Scotch and Irish homeland songs. In general, long ballads were not sung unless requested. "MacPherson's Rant" (MC 88) was a shorter narrative well received, memorably sung by traveller Davie Stewart. (See Tocher 15, pp. 262-80.) Busking was a solo tradition, although a mate or family member often accompanied to hold the hat or shoebox for collection of the loor (cant = money). The tradition faded during the 1950s and 60s as transistor radios and other mechanical aids to music listening became popular. Today busking has been revived at the Glasgow Folk Festival and some fairs, but whether or not these will attract the travellers as entertainers remains to be seen.

Since the formation of the Traditional Music and Song Association in 1965, traveller men and women singers have been recognised for their mastery of traditional song and folk music. It is not uncommon for travellers to be invited to public concerts to entertain guests in hotel lounges or village halls, though their songs are not always thoroughly appreciated by nontraveller audiences. Well-meaning instrumentalists sometimes try to accompany travellers' singing with unsatisfactory results; the metre and fluid rhythms of their traditional

singing are not suited to ensemble music-making.

V. Why Some Travellers Don't Perform

Three of the eight narrative singers who became my main informants, three of the four female singers — Mrs Mary Williamson, Mrs Martha Johnstone and Mrs Bessie Whyte — were inhibited as song performers during their early married years. Two suffered in their marriages to jealous men who condemned their socializing. Merely sitting at camp-fire gatherings, unaccompanied, was forbidden or penalized by their husbands' beating them. The severity of the inhibition experience by Mary Williamson may be measured by her denial of learning any new songs during forty years of travelling across Scotland, through Inverness, Forfar, Banff, Perth, Fife, Argyll and Skye from 1935 - 1975; after she married at the age of fifteen she learned two songs — ones her husband sang, "Duncan Campbell" (Laws Q20) and "Come open the Door" (76/204/B8). The balance of her repertoire consisted of songs learned in childhood. See plate 6.

Mrs Bessie Whyte was never restrained from performing, but participating in ceilidhs with her husband's relations was curtailed because of their pre-emptive "cracking" (talking) and the Whyte's eminent singing. Mrs Martha Johnstone was another woman who had little opportunity to develop her interest in singing old songs for her peer group. If she had attended sing-songs with different traveller families around camp fires in her adult travelling years, c. 1917 - 1950, she would have upset her jealous husband.[10] This she did not want to do in case he would have turned on her and given her a beating.

Plate 6. Mary Williamson, an inhibited performer during early married years, from 1934. She sings "Lady Margaret" (CH 7) introspectively for me alone. Cumlodden camp, Argyll, 1978.

> No, she wasna a battered wife, she was afraid tae be a battered wife. She'd seen so much o it and she knew her man was jealous .... he was jealous o old Peasie [Martha's nickname] having a good time, he was jealous o old Peasie speakin tae somebody else, he was jealous o old Peasie if she went among other traivellers in case some other man maybe speak tae her .... When Peasie cam back fae the toon she couldna walk across and sit and crack at some other woman's fire and crack to another woman — she had to always be there [in or by her own tent] .
>
> (DW, 83/73/A)

Was this normal? Duncan Williamson has answered, "Yes a lot o women was like that. See the Campbeltown women, they were the very same as auld Peasie." (Idem.) According to Duncan, who had camped frequently with Martha Johnstone's parents and occasionally with Martha and her husband in the 1940s,

> Martha and Sandy [her husband] were kind o close-knittit folk, they kept to theirsel, ken, in Fife, doun Tayport, Newport. Auld Sandy was there for about a year on a fairm, he used to take casual work .... But if auld Peasie and Sachie [Sandy] came to a group o folk, they would pass on, they wouldna camp beside other folk. Well, they liked to be by theirsel, ye see. Some traivellers liked to be by theirsel and they didna join . . . we had traivellers who went in kind o groups and who liked the company o other traivellers. And ye had the like o Peasie 'n Sachie who never .... camp beside somebody else. See what A mean, that's what we call 'close-knit folk,' we call them 'close-knittit,' like.
>
> (83/73/B)

Jealousy affected the behaviour of spouses in the "close-knit" families of Kintyre and Perthshire such that some wives became self-effacing in order to avoid punishment. This introversion was bound to affect their potentiality for performance adversely. Thus it required a certain amount of encouragement from Martha's listeners before she would attempt the singing of some songs.

It would be false to give the impression that a traveller man,

by virtue of his sex, would necessarily have had more opportunities to perform than a woman traveller. Duncan Williamson has testified to the acute feelings of jealousy some traveller women as well as men were prone to harbour. Attention given a man for his singing could be and was easily interpreted by a jealous wife as a deceitful ploy on the singer's part to gain the sexual interest of a female listener. Or if a married man praised a woman for her singing, a wife might take offense and "batter" the husband with abusive language. Rather than upset their spouses, some men who were married to jealous wives and enjoyed singing, avoided joining a campfire get-together and would sacrifice opportunities to perform.

Chapter Two

THE OLD SONG GENRE AND TRAVELLER BALLADRY

I. Song Categories

There are four main categories of songs distinguished by travellers: a) "Western cowboy songs" which became popular in the 1930s when most traveller families acquired wind-up horn gramophones for playing 78 rpm records of the American singer Jimmy Rogers, the general favourite for hundreds of travellers who learned and still sing his songs; b) travellers' "ain sangs" — composed by various travellers about their life, other travellers and their customs; c) "pop songs" which are heard over the radio and seen on television accompanied by video recordings; d) "old songs" which are usually but not exclusively rooted in a family tradition, and are learned from the elderly who pass them on by singing, or by teaching, family members or other travellers who are interested.

I.1. Western Cowboy Songs

These are equivalent to "country and western" songs, as the travellers born after World War II call them. Today they have the widest appeal among the traveller community of any type of song. The "cowboy" songs fulfill both a private and a social need for many travellers. The ethos of "The West," pioneering days in America with wagons rolling westward and folks gathering around outside fires, has for several decades led the majority of travellers' choices for subjects with which to occupy their private leisure time — singing

country and western songs, listening to musical recordings of country and western artists on cassettes, records, radio and television and reading "westerns."[1] The pleasure most often afforded by this type of song is basically simple and direct. Its expression is not confounded by abstruse content, gravity or seriousness requiring comment or thoughtful interpretation. A traveller will often acknowledge the end of a friend's visit or a ceilidh with the saying, "Dinna gang awa wi a sad heart!" and sing a country and western song.

Country and western songs are sung both during quiet visits and more gregarious gatherings, and may be sung for the express purpose of reviving the memory of a deceased family member. Some Western cowboy songs were and are cherished by, and identified with, certain individuals, so that singing a song favoured by someone departed from life elicits vivid memories of the loved one, and a strong emotional response in the singers as well as in the listeners (discussed in chapter one).

I.2. Their Ain Sangs

The travellers' "ain sangs" (songs made by travellers) would be sung during their ceilidhs, when singing them would strengthen family solidarity among those actually present, and also reinforce the spiritual bond with those travellers long since departed from life -- whom the song texts are usually about. Traveller-composed songs which are not about particular travellers or their customs are still associated with specific emotions, ones which the travellers are most familiar with: e.g., mother or familial sentiments (Duncan Williamson's "Home to Barra," 76/35/A4), sympathy with the kindly "Hielander" (DW's "Angus was a Policeman") and longing for

one's homeland (DW's "Cuillins of Skye," 76/47/B3 and 77/221/B4, sung by DW's second cousin, John Townsley). Such songs are most often composed at the request of a close traveller friend or relative. Thus it happens that a composed song, sung by a singer/composer, may reinforce group unity on two levels if listeners present know why and for whom the composed song was made — if the original recipient of the composed song has died, then the singing of that particular song may kindle memories of the departed traveller for those present, replacing a broken physical bond with a renewed spiritual one.

I.3. Pop Songs

Pop songs may be learned by younger travellers. One favourite of travellers born in the 1960s was "It's Cryin Time Again," sung in the early style of Danny Osmond (re. Marion Townsley, 75/213/A5 and Colleena Price's daughter, 76/14/B7). Travellers born in the 1970s are attending disco dances, though the extent of this socializing among non-travellers by younger travellers, its acceptability to a wide cross-section of traveller parents, has not been determined. It does indicate a preference or inclination, at least, for pop music by some younger members of the traveller community.

Pop songs were clearly distinguished from "old songs" by Martha Johnstone in a discussion we had about "good songs" in 1978:

> M — Ah, I like the old songs. Yes, there's something special in them. More the, you would think the words are more placed together better as these pop songs. I dinna like these pop songs. You see, aa the young yins is comin up now, even yourself, it's aa they pop songs, isn't it? It's not the same.

L — The pop songs mean something to the young people.

M — Oh, oh it's just for a jollification; it's no for somethin hearty that you want to hear! You see, the old songs, there's something into it that makes you listen, ye ken. The way they're [the words] are placed. But you see, they pop songs, they're no the same at all. No.

(78/109/B5)

I.4. Old Songs

"Old songs" can be Scots or Gaelic songs with texts about a homeland or songs with texts about love, friendship, death, condemned criminals, soldiers, fishermen, sailors, orphans, travelling, comic and bawdy subjects, farm work and holidays. The function of the old song tradition is to pass on knowledge that was the province of a particular family, real heritage, something a traveller family could claim as their own.

Martha Johnstone had contrasted pop songs with old songs not only in 1978, but also in 1977 and 1957 — and always after she had sung "Banks o Airderie-O" (CH 14). I questioned her about her meaning of "special," for she had said, "Ye see, the songs they make nooadays is . . . thes things on the wireless, ye ken, there's nothing special about it."

L — Why is that? .... What do you think makes this song different from ones that they sing today?

M — Well, I think the songs that was made in the olden time were more cheery, hearty! And well put together.

(78/109/A5)

The "special" quality of old songs for many travellers is not something intrinsic to the song per se. An old song is meaningful for a traveller singer because it is inextricably connected in his mind with the person who had sung it. Duncan Williamson has said that when he sings an old song, "I sing about my father and mother;

at's what makes a good song -- if your father and mother sang it to you." (77/202/B3) And the point of singing is to impress upon the listener a respectful attitude towards the singer of the past who was responsible for the song, who had kept it alive in memory. Whenever a narrative or old song was sung, tribute was always made to the man or woman who had possessed it -- " . . . another one o ma mither's" (Johnnie Whyte) or "This is my daddy's song" (Duncan Williamson, see plate 1). And if an old song had been regularly sung by a traveller to a child or interested listener, the singer eventually became identified with the song.

Plate 1. Duncan Williamson sings one of his father's old songs. Montrose, 1978.

In a discussion between three travellers during a ceilidh in Montrose in 1977, the appeal of old songs was explained. Duncan Williamson thought the subject of the story in an old song, especially if it was about courage, appealed to the travellers. (77/201/ B2) But as a listener, more than a singer, of the old songs, Mary Stewart answered my question,

L — Why do you like hearing about things that happened so long ago [in song] ? ....

M — I think it's just because it was auld sangs that you heard yir people singin. .... I think it's really, it takes back memories. I think it just puts ye on mind . . . well, your grandfather sung these songs and aa thing like that .... You think you're relivin it, it reminds you o a certain person.

(77/201/B2)

At least two travellers who took pride in singing the old songs, Martha Johnstone and Duncan Williamson, were recorded talking about their fidelity to the original words (Martha) or story (Duncan) of an old song. Both felt they were in a direct line of descent from the original singing of an old song, having recourse to its origin.

L — When do you think they were made [old songs] ?

M — Oh, they'd be made, made about, oh made about, I think long, long long before Queen Victoria. Because they went through the older people, the older people, you see. ....

L — Where did the words come from?

M — The words, well, they placed the words together to match each word, you see. It's just the same as Robert Burns done. Ye ken, he tried to place his words . . . well, the old people at one time, that's what they done, they tried for to get a word to match with the next word and then that made the song.

L — Do you do that when you sing it now? Do you try to match the words when you sing it now?

M — That's the way that I, that you hear, that you will hear me sayin it. That's the way it was placed when it was made, ye see!

L — [Making sure that I understood Martha, I repeated —]
Ya. The way you do it now— [and she confirmed—]

M — yes,

L — is the way—

M — yes,

L — it was done when it—

M — yes,

L — was made.

(MJ, 78/109/A5-B1)

The same fundamentally conservative view of ones-self as a tradition-bearer was evident in the following testimony from Duncan Williamson:

> I regard myself as a kind of minstrel, passing songs on to others who like to hear them. .... To sing the original you would have to be there when the story took place. .... Listening to songs down through the years, listening to so many songs gives a sense of knowing when you hear the true thing. .... You can know the true story, the original. Nobody can reproduce the original, but there's degrees of getting close to it. I try to bring the listener's mind to the place and time when the thing really happened, to show the listener, convey to him what took place at that time.
>
> (Interview, 20/5/77)

II. The Traveller Ballad — Its Distinctive Features

No special category of "storied songs" or "sung stories" was defined by any traveller. In 1972 Jane Turriff said, "Dae ye ken, there's a story in every song. There's a story." (72/208) This comment was quoted by James Porter in support of his concluding argument in an article on the Turriff family songs, that 'the distinction between narrative and lyric songs is "uneasy" and "inadequate."'[2] While the term "ballad" was only used by two of the author's informants (prior to the author's acquaintance with them), some old songs were set apart from the others in their class because they were also known as stories and indeed told as stories. Some old songs were part of a storytelling tradition as well as of a singing tradition — some were partly sung and partly told, or recited without a tune, or were narrated in prose. And there were likewise some stories partly sung and partly told, or stories which travellers reported they'd heard as songs. (See section IV below.) In general, a traveller ballad may be defined as "an old song that had a story along wi it." (DW, Interview, 2/85)

I.1. Its Length

One of the earliest discussions with Duncan Williamson, when he expressed his concept of "ballad," was recorded by David Clement of the Gaelic Linguistic Survey (Edinburgh University). During a ceilidh he and his friend Breandán Ó Cíobháin had with Duncan and his brother George at Lingerton Lay-by (near Lochgilphead, Argyll) in April 1976, the song about the three brothers and a jailbreak (CH 188) was requested from Duncan by Breandán; he called it "The Twa Brothers" by mistake:

D — No, no 'Twa Brothers,' it's no 'Twa Brothers.' You got lost somewhere — it's four brothers. An I'll tell ye a wee story, A'll tell him the wee story. Put it on, ye can put it on tape if ye want! See, away back .... aboot the fifteenth century, there used tae be a great prison doun in Carlisle .... and Dumfries jail is a big jail, well there's nothing left o it, it's a' ruins today .... there were four brothers .... the oldest brother was in jail in Carlisle an he was gaunna be hung tomorra at six o'clock when the cock crowed. An the story is not startin off fae where the brother goes to pri— but it was a wee lassie sittin lookin oot her window haerd the story be these two brothers .... but one brother was a better man than the rest, he was the stronger and more powerful than anybody else .... He says, 'Wir gaunna go and get wir brother out o jail' .... and the other brother says, 'We cuid never dae it.' He says, 'Luik, A can dae it!' 'Well,' says the other brother, 'Right, well, you're the boss, we'll follae you' .... Noo, this is a song, ye know, Hughie, it's a ballad. You know what a ballad is, a ballad is an awful long thing is — Sir Walter Scott cuid never write a ballad in his life. He said about a ballad — a ballad is a thing, ye're better tellin a story as singin a ballad.

DC — Well, we feel the other way around, we'd rather hear the song than—

D — We'd rather hae the song, we'd rather hae the sing [sic] as tell the ballad. ....

(LS T.10.A.)

In quite a different context, eight years later, in 1984, Duncan was telling me where he had first heard a story called "The Broonie of Torquil Glen."[3] He recalled "a wee party" in Fraserburgh where he'd told the story to Betsy Whyte while visiting her in 1948, and Betsy had responded, "You might think that's a story, but my faither used to sing that song." (84/65/A4) Betsy had told Duncan, "I dinnae ken the tune very well, but A remember a wee bit o the verse my faither used tae sing," and then she gave him two quatrains in rhyme. Then Duncan explained,

> A long time ago the travelling people got round the campfire, told stories and sang songs. But someone sang a long song, then saw it was too long and the people around the fire were

> getting a bit fidgety and disinterested. So the singer stopped and told a wee part, sang another part -- and I do that myself sometimes with ballads. Probably 'The Broonie o Torquil Glen' was sung in verse as a long song.
>
> (84/ Ibid.)

Johnnie Whyte often used the descriptive phrase, "long song" in recording sessions,

> All the songs that I've got, they're all high songs and they're all long songs. There's nae songs with one or two verses with me, they're awa about seven or eight, maybe mair verses. They're all long.
>
> (JW, 75/125/A2)

Although Johnnie's use of "long" was adjectival, it was significant that he prided himself on being able to sing the "long songs." As a term, "long song" is the closest equivalent to "ballad" in the travellers' vernacular. "Muckle sang," used in the North-East, is the literal translation in Scots.

II.2. Its Import

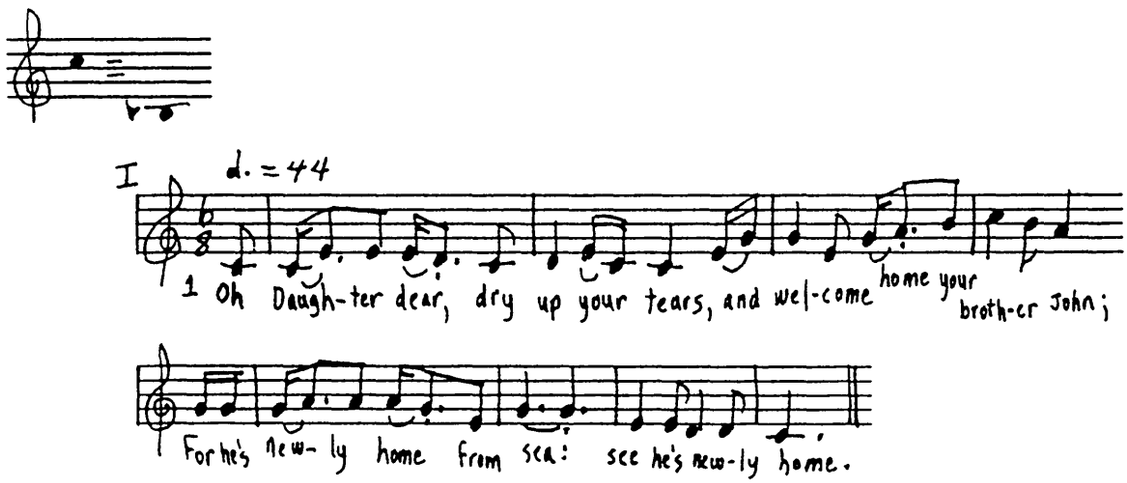
Because ballads belong to both musical and storytelling traditions in traveller society, they function in a special relationship to cultural values of the group. The content of ballads takes at least part of its import from storytelling, the educational vehicle of the community.[4] In the traveller ballad there is a frontier, a touchstone of the farthermost limits of knowledge or experience, which more than one singer have commented on. About the story of "Tam Lin" (CH. 39) or "Lady Margaret," as many travellers know it, Duncan Williamson has said, "It's really something you can't explain . . . could be fictional or reality, too far back for us to understand." (75/192/A4) After singing "The Cruel Brother" and "Bonnie George Campbell" (CH. 210), during a ceilidh with her family and the author and her family, Nellie Stewart

explained what she thought about the content of "George Campbell:"

> All Scottish songs — there're a story attached to them, I think they're true. Anything in Scottish history at a song is sung, it is absolutely true. .... When I'm singin I really feel that I'm singin history. History is Scotland. .... It is Scotland when you're singin the songs. All Scottish ballads — they're really history and that's why I'm so interested in them. They're true. If you're singing, you're singin a legend.
>
> (NS, 78/103/A5)

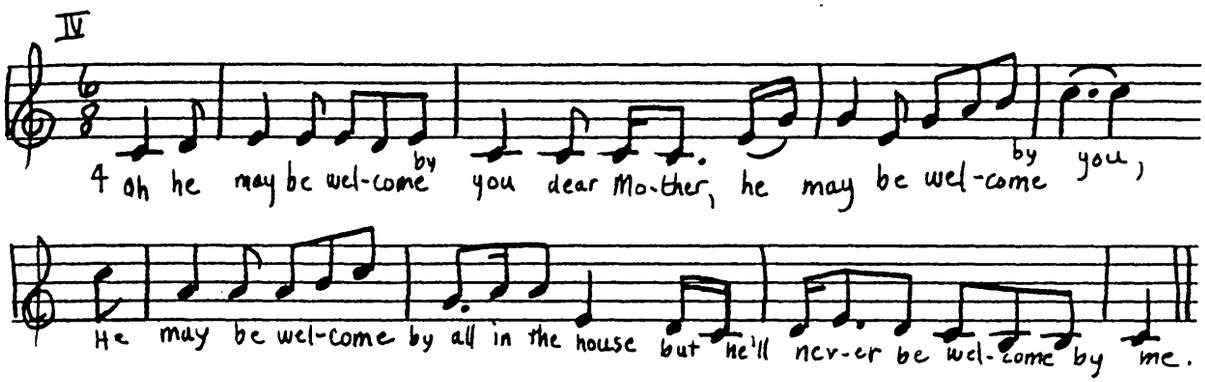
The meaning of a ballad was not discussed in an abstract way by the old travellers. It was talked about in the context of the song's performance. Thus when I asked Martha Johnstone the philosophical question, "What is it about the old songs that makes them good?" she gave only half of her answer in speech, "You see, there's something into it that makes you listen, ye ken; they way they're [the words are] placed. (78/109/A5) Her complete answer was given in song, for with no further prompting she sang the following version of Child 52.

Example 1. Martha Johnstone, "He'll Never be Welcome by Me," 78/109/B6. Standard strophe established at vs. 4.



2
Oh he may be welcome by you dear Mother, he may be welcome by you;
He may be welcome by all in the house, but he'll ne'er be welcome
by me.

3
Oh [I] hope the ship at he sails on, may never reach dry land;
Nor yet the land that he walks on, but the grass may refuse to
grow.



5
A heavy stone dropped on my foot, it's down by yon woodside;
So I hope the ground that he walks on, that the grass may refuse
to grow.

6
And I hope the ship that he sails on, may never reach dry land;
For he may be welcome by you dear Mother, but he'll never be
welcome by me.

That this particular song, a ballad, was pregnant with meaning for Martha, she made clear in an earlier recording session with Peter Shepherd in 1967. After singing the ballad she had told Peter,

.... I mind on my mother used to tell us, sing that [song]. And then she would tell us the meanin o like what it was. The way my mother told us is . . . 'when there be five or six when her brother [John] was young . . . at those days they got in the Navy about twelve or thirteen, and he was a long long time away in the Navy. And this girl was . . . when he was comin home on leave and he met the girl in the wood, and,' as you [Peter] say and I say, 'he done his job' [he raped her]. And when she cam back to her mother and she was cryin when she cam back to her mother. And the mother says,

Oh dry up yir tears my Rosie Ann
And welcome home your brother John;
For he's newly home from sea,
See he's newly home.

And she says,

As I bein walkin down by thon woodside
A heavy stone dropped on my foot
And ruined my fair bodie.

You see? So it's jist tellin you as well — isn't it? With that. So she says tae . . . the mother still wantit her in the house and she wadna go and she said tae her mother,

A hope the ship that he sails on
That he may never reach dry land,
Nor yet the land that he walks upon
That the grass may refuse to grow.

Ye see?

(PS, 67/5/B31)

While this explanation of the story meaning is disjointed, it's excusable because Martha was telling it to a non-traveller man whom she did not know intimately! One can easily picture Martha's mother telling the meaning of the incestuous relationship between a brother and sister to her own children, in order to educate them — and first singing the song to them to rouse their interest and attention.

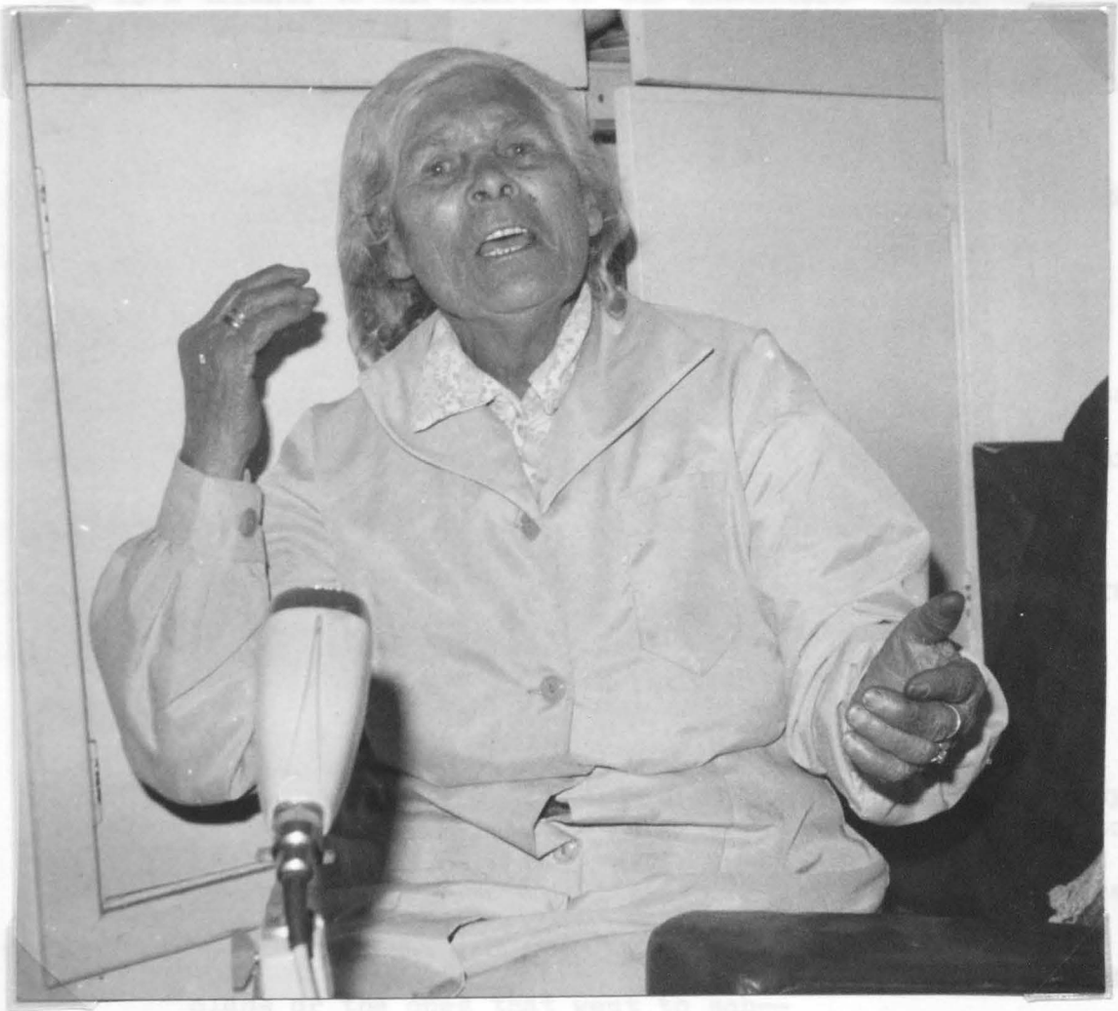


Plate 2. Martha Johnstone singing,
"Oh the smith, he spoke oot wi joy," from
"The Tailor and the Plouman." Coupar Angus, 1977.

II.3. The Ballad's Function as Song

As an old song, the ballad's function was to move the listener to feel joy or sorrow, to instill the actual sensation of pleasure or

grief. The story by itself could not move the listener to feel happiness or sadness; only in song was the full emotive potential of a story realized.

It is a tribute to the health of the travellers' ballad tradition that the stories they sang were not about themselves or their own situation. Their ballad singing tradition was not pathologically introverted — for the stories that moved them to feel happy through the medium of song were about folk they looked up to, idealized. Martha Johnstone's view of the differences between the rich and the poor would seem to have been a typical outlook on life of one who was deprived of schooling and felt inadequate because illiterate, but this following discussion shows quite clearly that making and singing the ballads were pleasurable activities because the subjects of the songs were the aristocracy.

M — .... well, them that could write, ye ken . . . there were very very little children at school once upon a time. Aye, it would need to be people with high, plenty money that could afford to pay for their children at, to get education. The poorer working class couldna. That was the way of it. And then they had tae make the songs to please theirsel to keep a wee jollification! See!

L — Who do you think made the [old] songs? The poor working class or the ones that went to sch—

M — Oh, the worker, the poor working classes would make them more than likely. And then, ye see, maybe a lady or a gentleman or a king or a queen — they would make songs about them. And then, you see, this kept them happy when they had a wee jollification, ye ken? .... That's it.

L — When they got together —

M — Got together. That's the way it workit out. And I think they were much better than the way they're doin the day. Do you no think so?

L — Oh yes! [laughs]

M — Happy, they were happy.

(78/109/B1)

The listener's emotional involvement in a sung performance of a story was a most important function of the ballad as song. It was probably a reason why some stories were sung rather than spoken. To instill deep sorrow in a listener, to move him to weep, was the special province of a long song.

L — Why do you think they're so long, these old songs?

Bes and A — Just telling a story. ....

L — But why did your mother sing instead of tell it?

B — She sung it and tellt it. .... During my mother's time there was nothing else.

L — Now we like to sing gay, cheery things . . . don't seem to have so much time for dreary things.

B — They didnae. The story was actual, it really happened. These old ballads really happened. And this was tellin the story in song. They liked it! They would sit greetin, aw they would listen for hoors!

(BW and sister Alice Marescht, 78/108/A2)

The word "coniach," connected with the Legend of the Weeper,[5] was used by traveller Belle Stewart (Blairgowrie) to describe the good singer's ability to move the listener in his performance of a narrative.

III. Why Speech in Some Narrative Song Performances

There are three obvious reasons why some ballads are not performed completely in song, but have a spoken part or parts. The first is that the singer cannot remember the complete song text so he resorts to speech when his memory fails him. A second reason stresses the important factor of the audience — a performer may decide his listeners would pay closer attention to the narrative if it were spoken. Perhaps he is not communicating the song effectively, to his satisfaction, so he reverts to speech, re. DW's explanation of performing "long songs" above, p. 67. The third reason a ballad may be partly spoken in perfor-

mance is because the song itself can not adequately hold the complete story; in song, not enough of the story can be expressed. According to Gerould, a traditional ballad has "a good deal left unexplained. What lies before and after [the song text] remains in darkness, and can be learned only by inference." (1932, p. 89)

Some specific examples of ballad performances will help show how communicating the complete story was important to traveller narrators. And their reasons for partly telling certain ballads will be examined in the context of their performances, which is the best way to understand the singers' intentions.

III.1 Telling it for the Listener who Doesn't Know

On my second visit to Bessie Whyte with Peter Cooke, Bessie explained the story of "Young Johnstone" (CH 88) when she couldn't recall the complete song text. And she told us, "Away back before my grandfather there were lots of auld songs that needed explaining." (74/63/A16) Bessie offered her interpretation of the ballad story to us because we were without knowledge of the song as she knew it, and indeed that was the main reason for going to see her for a second recording session. In the natural traveller context of singing to an audience of listeners who were ignorant of a story, e.g., singing to traveller children or distantly related travellers from another part of the country, a singer would probably tell the story before singing. After Bessie had performed "Young Johnstone" in 1975 (completely), she told her audience of young non-traveller women, "Mother would tell the story to the bairns before she sung the song." (75/150/B5)

The best example I have recorded of a ballad performed as a

story and a song is Duncan Williamson's "Hind Horn" (CH 17) as he performed it for traveller Mary Stewart in a ceilidh with the Whytes in Montrose. See ex. 2. Why Duncan "wanted to tell the story" before singing was to make sure Mary was interested. Duncan has reservations about performing this narrative in song because he dislikes the interlaced refrain form of the text. This he explained after the performance in 1977, and I have quoted him in chapter four on his understanding of the refrain, its function for the ballad story. Here the point about "Hind Horn" is that the singer feels he will not get get enough of the story across to his listener, having to weave his narrative in and out of the refrain, "O lee lye an sae lonely O," so he tells her a very detailed story first — and with much of the text in cant so that Mary should not fail to understand his explicit meaning.

Unusually, Duncan had offered "Hind Horn" to his audience on this occasion. This was unique in that he does not sing this ballad unless requested, because he feels basically frustrated with the interlaced refrain form of the song; he thinks the continuous repetition is boring to the listener. Holding the attention of his audience for thirty strophes, when half the text is repetition, Duncan finds problematic. In this example, ex. 2, note the increased repetition of narrative lines from vs. 21 and the pitch rise on the final of vs. 23, evidence of the singer's impatience with the song form — and most telling is the increase in tempo, the greatest increase in the performance, after vs. 24, from ♪ = 100 to ♪ = 120.

Example 2. Duncan Williamson, "Hind Horn," 77/202/A1, 2. Complete performance, including story told to Mary Stewart before the song.

D — I'll sing something better for ye than 'John Barleycorn.'

D — This is a grand bene gadgie, he was a good gadgie, ken. And he's in love with a gurie, young gurie, see!

And anyway, the faither and mother says tae me, says tae him, he says, 'You're no fit . . . that woman's no good enough for you,' he said. They were eerie — like you or son Hendry, ye see: and Hendry's said he's in love wi a woman and you think that you're no, that the woman wasna good enough for him, ye see. So naturally, nothing ye can dae. Send Hendry — be it tae the Army or send him to the sea or send him to be a airman or something else. [eerie = afraid]

So this man said the best thing he could dae is send his son to the sea and be a sailor — to get rid o the gurie!

But anyway, he wouldna get rid o the gurie, the bene gadgie, the young ged wouldna get rid o the gurie. So he went an tellt the gurie his faither an mother wasna pleased aboot the cairyy-on. And they were gaun to send him away to the sea to be a sailor, ye see! So away, way, away he goes and tells the young lassie, 'Look,' he says, 'my faither and mither doesna want me to marry you,' he said. [ged = man]

And she says, 'Well,' she says, 'what are ye gaunna dae?'

'Well,' he says, 'the best thing [ta'] dae, ... if ma faither and mither wants tae put me away to the sea and be a sailor'. . . So I want to tell you the story, ye see!

But she says, she took the ring off her finger, she says, 'There's my ring! Gold ring,' she says. She said, 'Tak that wi ye and go to sea,' she said. 'But if you ever see,' she said, she says, '[it] gettin dull and wan,' she says, 'you'll ken I'm in trouble. Come back to me immedintely.' [sic]

'O.K., sweetheart,' he said, 'I'll dae that.'

Away goes the young ged to the sea, ye see. But anyway he goes to the sea and he sails around the sea for years an years and a day and he looks one day and he sees his ring — oh! Couldna look at it! Like at ma ring there — couldna look at it.

He says to the captain, 'My ring,' he said, 'I'm goin back to the sea [land]. ' Back he goes. He said, 'My girlfriend's in trouble.'

So he lands back to land and the first thing he met was an old beggar, an old, an aul' beggarman, see. An aul' gadgie, an old beggar in the street, you see. He said, 'You're old beggar,' he said, 'what happened?' he said.

'Oh,' he says, the old beggar, he said, 'You canna go doun to that toon,' he said. 'There's the beggest weddin goin on there,' he said, 'in the world,' he said, doll [Mary], he said. 'The biggest weddin in the world, but,' he said, 'the faither wants the gurie to marry this gadgie and she'll no dae it. She wants,' he said, 'to marry somebody else. But,' he said, 'her father wants her to marry . . . and there's the biggest cairry-on in the world and I wouldna advise you to go to that place,' see?

So .... he said to the old guy, he said to the aul' buck, aul' buckman, he said . . . in auld days they wore wigs, ye ken,

[buckman = tramp]

wigs in their hair, they've wigs . . . he said to the old tramp, 'Look, wad you gie me yourold coat,' he said, 'to put on me?'

The old tramp thocht he was moich, ye see. .... 'You're moich,' the tramp— [moich = crazy]

'You gie me your coat,' he said. He said, 'Gie me your auld grey hair and I'll gie you . . . (aul grey hair,' he said) . . . 'my sword and — you switch! Switch places wi me,' he said, 'and let me be the old tramp, and you go as me.'

Oh, the old tramp thocht he was moich, ye see, doll. This young ged dressed as the auld tramp gadgie and down he goes to the bene, to the bene cane where everyone to the weddin's going, ye see.

He knocks at the door. Out comes the maid, ye see. He says to the maid, he said, 'I want a drink.'

She said, 'You want a drink o what?'

'Anything,' he said, 'I'm an old tramp.' Now this auld gadgie was dressed in rags, ye see, and the maid comes oot.

She goes back to the bene mort and she said to the bene mort, she says, 'There're an auld tramp,' she said, 'at the door wantin a drink,' she said.

'Well,' says the bene mort,' she said, 'what does he want a drink for?'

She says, 'He wants a drink,' she says '"for Hind Horn's sake."'

Noo when the bene mort heard the name mentioned, "Hind Horn," she couldna resist hersel — she must see what the old tramp was wantin, ye see. So she filled a glass o wine. She goes to the old tramp and she gies it to the auld tramp, ye see.

The auld tramp drinks the wine up and he takes the ring off his finger, like the ring I've got there, and he places it in the glass and he hands it tae the bene mort.

And the bene mort looks and she sees the ring in front o her. And the bene mort kens then in her own mind what had happened, see? The bene mort knows then right away. She says tae him, she says . . . Noo this is a long long song and a long ballad, maybe you dinna even want to hear about it. . . . She says, 'Where did you get that ring?' she says to the old buckman, see? She says, 'There's only one ring like that in the world,' she says, 'I give it to my young friend before he went away to sea,' she said. 'Did you get it,' she says, 'by sea or by land, or did you get it frae a drowning man?'

'No,' says the auld buckman,' he says, 'I never got it fae naebody,' he said. 'I got it fae you!' he said. And you know, he pulled off his auld grey wig and he flings it doun — there's a bonnie set o curls on his heid. And he takes off the auld buck's coat and he flings it doun, ye see.

And then the young gurie looks and she sees it's hiem and she puts her airms roond him and she gets mairred tae him and that's the end of the wee story.

M — End o the story.

D — That's the story, that's the end o it.

L — Well, how does the song go?

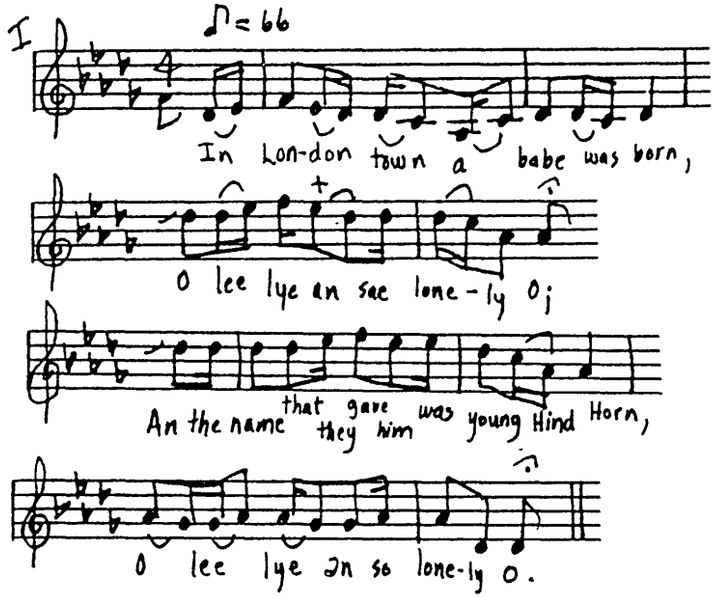
M — So you've to tell us it — sing the sang now!

D — But it's a . . . maybe youse'll no be interested!

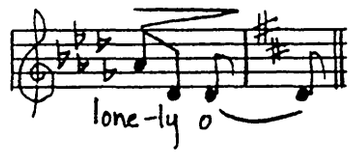
M — Aye we will!

D — [sings the complete narrative].

I



2 Then he grew up to be a handsome man,
O lee lye an sa' lonely O;
Withhis cloak on his back and his sword in his hand,
O lee lye an sae



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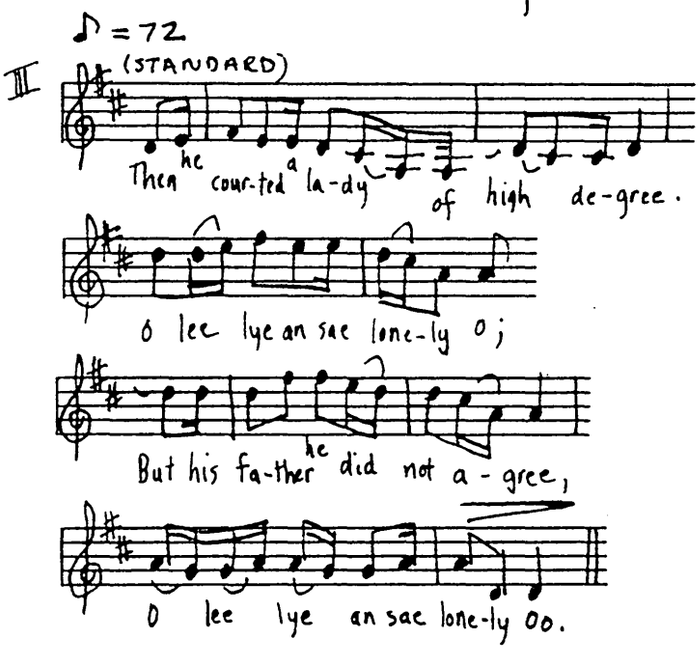


4 Sayin, Son I'm sending you to sea,
0 ....
Oh for a captain oh you must be,
0 ....

5 But Hind Horn loved his lady fair,
0 ....
She had rolling eyes and dark brown hair,
0 ....

6 ♪ = 80
Then straight awa to his lady he did gae- ,
0 ....
Sayin, my father's sending me off tae sea,
0 ....

7 So she offered him her right hand,
0 ....
Sayin, Hind Horn will you be my man?
0 ....

8 But I am off, said he, to the sea,
0 ....
To be a sailor I must be,
0 ....

9 ♪ = 88
Then she took a ring from her finger-0,
0 ....
You'll take this ring from me, she said,
0 ....

10 If you see this ring gettin dull and wan,
0 ....
You must leave the sea and you'll come to the land,
0 ....

11 So young Hind Horn, he sailed the world around,
0 ....
For a sailor he was bound,
0 ....

12 Then he saw his ring gettin dull and wan,
0 ....
And he goes right to his captain man,
0 ....

13 I must leave the sea and come to the land,
0 ....
Oh captain you must understand,
0 ....

14 ♪ = 96
So he left the sea and he cam to the land,
0 ....
And the first thing that he met was an old beggarman,
0 ....

15 Oh there is a weddin in oor king's toun,
0 ....
And the bride won't marry her bridegroom,
0 ....

17 He said, you gie me your aul' grey hair,
0 grey 'ye and sa' lonely 0;
Tae cover up mine o sae fair,
0 ....

18 ♪ = 100
Oh you gie me your auld ragged coat,
0 ....
And I'll gie to you my great new cloak,
0 ....

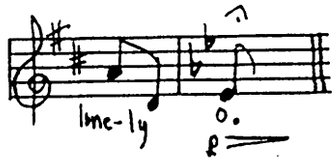
19 Oh you gie me your aul' crooked stave,
0 ....
And I'll gie to you my great broad sword,
0 ....

20 Young Hind Horn goes tae the great hall door,
O lyee lye ....
Dressed as the beggarman he's never been before,
O ....

21 Then he asked for a drink for Hind Horn's sake,
O ....
And a maid his message she did take,
O ....

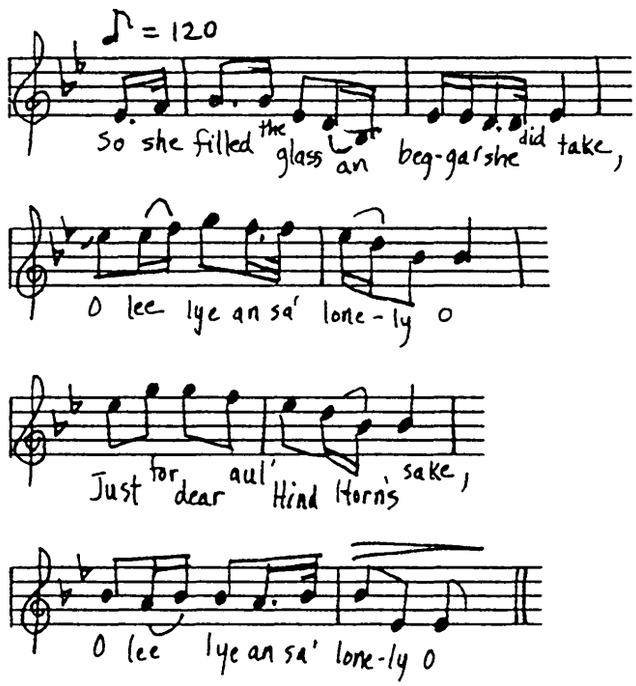
22 She took a message to her maiden fair,
O ....
There's a beggarman standing 'ith aul grey hair,
O ....

23 And he asked for a drink for Hind Horn's sake,
O ....
He asked for a drink for Hind Horn's sake,
O ....



24 When the lady heard it, it made her heart quake,
O dree lye an sa' lonely O;
When a beggar asked a drink for Hind Horn's sake,
O ....

XXV



26
So he drinks up the drink and he places in the ring,
0 ....
The hight of it made her heart sing, [sic]
0 ....

27
Oh where did you get that ring, that ring?
0 ....
Where did you get that ring, that ring?
0 ....

28 Oh did you get it by sea or by land?
0 ....
Or did you take it from a drowning man?
0 ....

29
I did not get it by sea or by land,
0 ....
I got it from your right hand,
0 ....

30 ♩ = 126
Then he pulled off his wig so rare,
0 ....
And then stood young Hind Horn sae fair,
0 ....

31
Then there was a weddin in that king's toon,
0 ....
And the bride was happy to wed her bridegroom,
0 ....

M — That's a good song, tha'!

D — There're too many 'lee lyes' and too many 'lee lows.'

M — That was good!

(77/202/A1, 2)

Perhaps Duncan's attitude towards the song form of "Hind Horn" will change in years to come. But for every one of the eight recordings of this ballad made between 1975 and 1978, Duncan always told at least half of the story first, often all of it before singing. And the future of this ballad in song will undoubtedly depend on the inclination of Duncan's future audiences — whether or not they would take pleasure in hearing this long song performed, and if <u>they</u> can convince the singer

they have the ability to attend to his long ballad, its repetitiveness.

III.2. Saving the Most Meaningful Part of the Narrative for Song

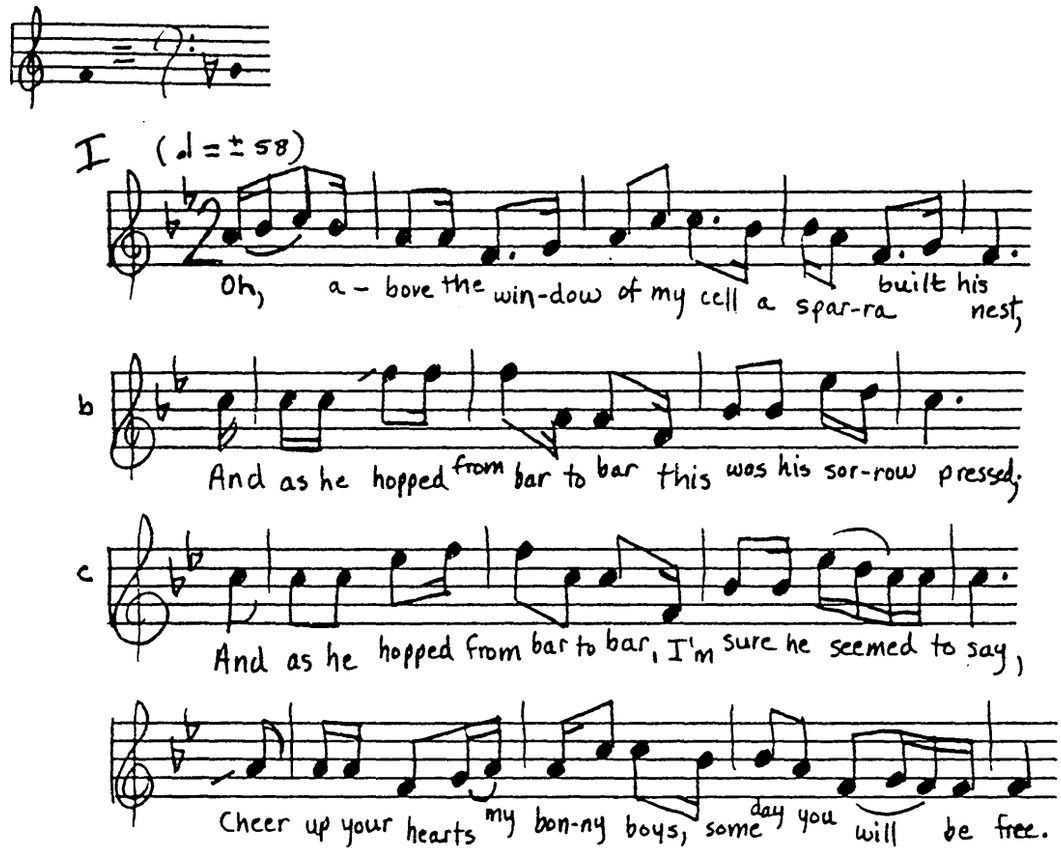
Mingled speech and song, chantefable or partially sung stories, seems to have been an authentic form of traveller narration. There is no scarcity of recorded examples: "Lord Beicham" (CH 53) on The Muckle Sangs disc, (Tangent TGM 119/D); "The Cruel Mother" (CH 20), 55/64/A1 in Bronson, 1976, p. 79; and "The Tramp and the Farmer," 67/140/B8 in Tocher 3, pp 69 - 70. Certain songs in certain traveller families were not sung unless accompanied by the balance of the story told. For example, "Canny wee Thing" (DW, 75/135/B4) was the song within the narrative of "The Cruel Mother," narrated only partly in song by members of the extended family of Argyllshire Williamson-Townsleys. (DW, Interview, 2/84)

The best example I have recorded of a ballad that in one traveller family was traditionally told as a story with a part of it sung, is Duncan Williamson's "Shanghai Ballad" (MC 99). It has been recorded from Duncan on five different occasions between 1975 and 1984, and only on the last occasion did he sing the complete story — because I asked him, "Could he?" See ex. 3. Martha Johnstone had sung him the complete ballad in 1977 and an Aberdeenshire traveller's short version (3 verses) was published in MacColl (1977, pp. 300-1); so I wondered about its song form in the Williamson family. Duncan has never sung the "Shanghai Ballad" without taking a drink of beer and he has testified that his father, from whom he learned the song, would never narrate the story unless he was drinking. (re. 75/141/A3) According to Duncan, alcohol is a necessity to the singer of this song for it helps a traveller cope with the emotional effects of the

song, the overpowering feeling of grief as the singer can't refrain from identifying with the person in the story.[6] Why this song was so very emotive, and why his father never sang the whole story were questions I put to Duncan in the following interview.

Example 3. Duncan Williamson, "The Shanghai Ballad" and contextual discussion about its meaning and form, 84/38/A1.

D -- Linda, this is a great ballad that was sung to me by my father, way back in the thirties. But to me it was just more .... a story than a ballad. So he sang it when he had a little to drink. But I'll sing it to you the way he used to sing it to me.



II

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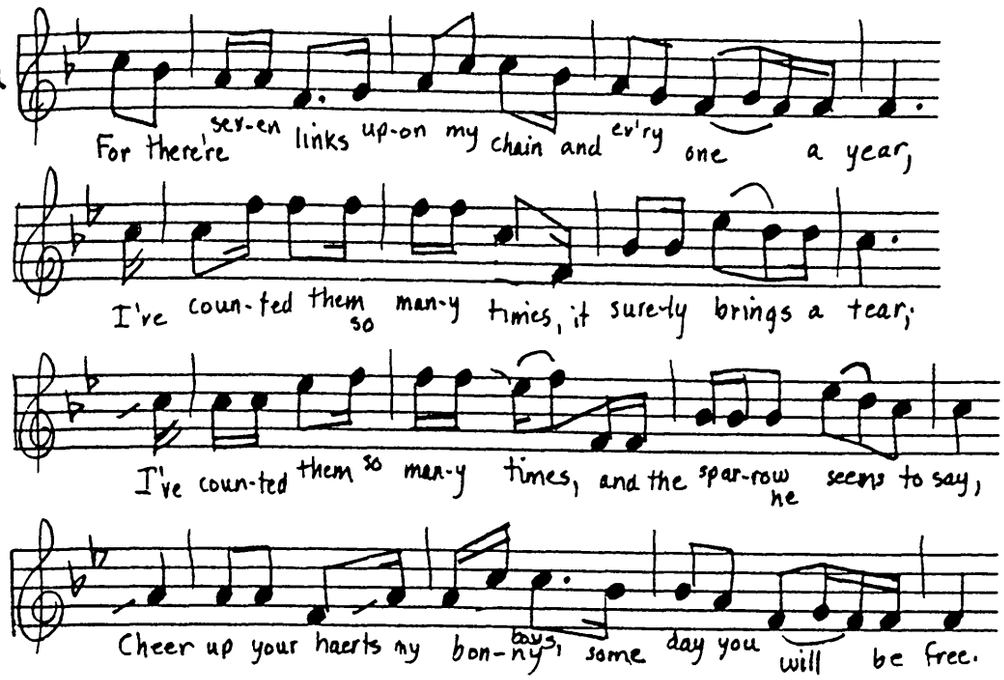
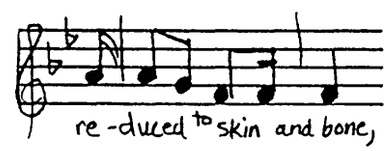
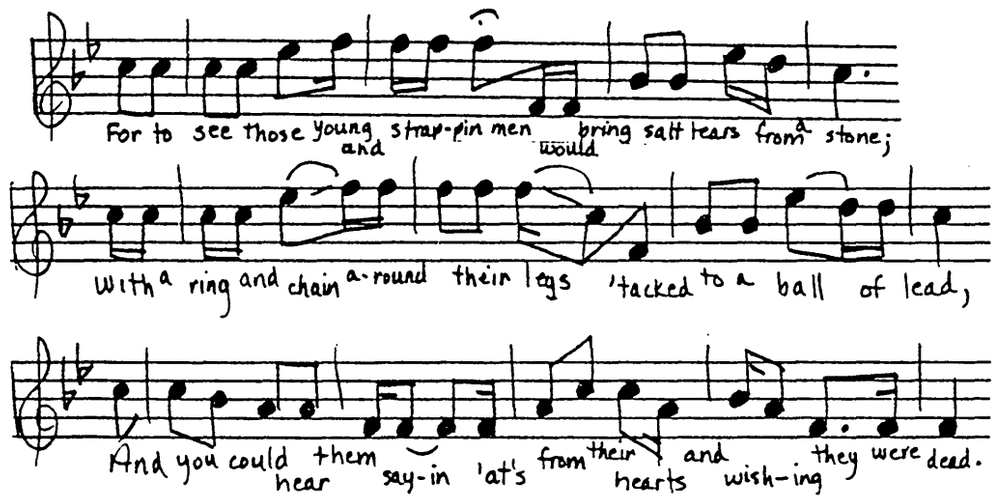


III

IIa

For to see those young and strappin men





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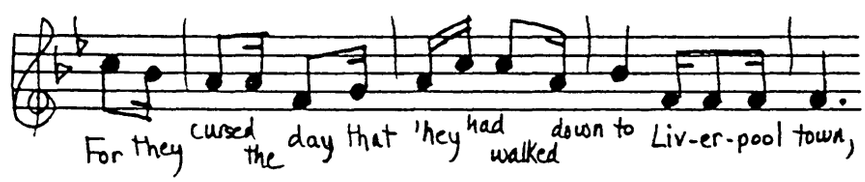
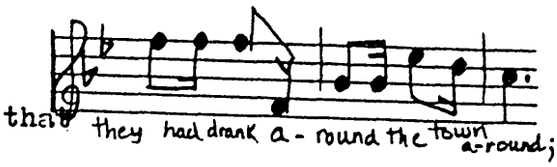
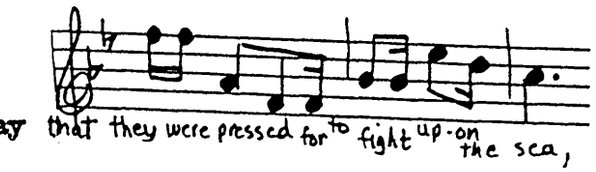
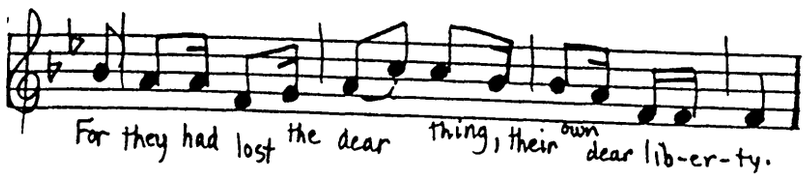


Ib They cursed the day that they had drank a-round the town a-round;



Ic They cursed the day that they were pressed for to fight up-on the sea,





D — That's the way my father used to sing it, Linda, and it makes me a bit sad when I remember — that his voice comes back to me when I try to sing it but I could never sing it the way he did. But it makes me a wee bit sad. .... It was only a story to me, but years later I discovered what ballads really were and I knew that my daddy was tryin to sing to me a story in song.

L — Did he sing the whole thing?

D — He sang the whole thing through and through — but he didna really sing the whole thing through and through, Linda, because I don't know if he wanted to sing it or not, but sometimes he told part of the story and then he sang the most important part that meant to be sung.

L — What part was that?

D — The part that he sang mostly was this:

[re-sings verse one, above.]

.... I met an old traveller man away back in Aberdeenshire a long time ago, away back about the 1950s, who was really interested in the song, was an old man called Hector Kelby. .... But the only part that I didn't know that he gave me was this . . . my father even knowing the song for so long (prob'ly his parents had sung the song down through the ages) but the part that I didn't know that old Hector Kelby had was

[re-sings first line of verse two, above.]

He'd counted these links, Linda, ken what A mean, the links attached—

L — Your father never sang that bit?

D — My father never had that bit, no; but old Hector Kelby had that bit, see what A mean? ....

L — Did your father start it with 'Above the window of my cell'— is that the way he started it?

D — No, my father didna start it with 'Above the window of my cell.' My father told the story. 'Above the window of my cell' came after the version. ....

He started the story about two young lads, who might have been traveller people, who couldha been, walkit down to Liverpool tae have a drink, tae have a night out on the town. And then they had a drink and they had a wee sing-song and they cam out walkin the street when up cam the Press Gang and took them and threw them on the boat! It was all sail boats in these days .... threw them on deck and they were drunk, so drunk they didna know what they were doin and they fell asleep on the deck. They fell asleep on the deck, but when they wakened up they were out in the middle of the Atlantic .... the sea — to fight against the Spanish! Because Queen Elizabeth the First had give permission, had gave orders that any young man who wouldna join the Navy should be pressed and put aboard the ship to fight for, to fight for the Navy. And that's why we beat the Spanish Armada, darlin. It wasna just by the Navy they had, but by the Press Gang, all the young men that was willin that was pressed inta, pressed means pushed into, ye see, that was pushed into the Navy and they fought.

But there was one particular ship that the Spaniards had, the Spanish had captured, they captured this one particular ship. And these two traveller boys was aboard the ship, and when they landed back they were prisoners o war, you understand what A mean? They were took back to base and they were threwn in a Spanish jail, in the jail, threwn in the jail in Spain. And they lay there.

And to keep them frae gettin away in case the jail wasna strong enough, they put a ball and chain around their leg 'tached to a ball of lead. This is back in the sixteenth century! And the one particular chap who, who kept his mind, who was free — many a mind, many of the m-minds had cracked up — but one particular chap, he might hae been a traveller, nobody knows, he couldha been a traveller — whose only, only comfort he had was a wee sparra who had come inta his cell and built his nest.

And he watched it lay its eggs and he watched it flyin from his cell, from window to window to lay its eggs till the young one cam oot, and it used to sing the wee song when it chirped — and this is what he made up!

....

L — .... you said you never heard very many travellers at that ballad?

D — Two, two travellers — my father and old Hector Kelby in Aberdeenshire. .... And Martha [Johnstone], Martha's people. .... They just didna pick it up as a song, Linda,

they picked it up because it meant so much to them .... so there must hae been a meanin .... There must hae been some meanin that that song meant so much to them, because prob'ly they had an idea that it was mebbe some o their relations was aboard the Spanish ship.

L — It's interesting that your aunts sang that . . .

D — Aye, ma Aunt Rachel and ma Aunt Nellie father's sisters sang it, because they loved their father's song. I mean if your father sings something, naturally you're gaunna. ....

(84/38/A1)

III.2.1. Incomplete songs. Now it could be argued that Duncan's father and his father simply didn't know the whole song text, so the song was mainly told as a story with the wee part in the middle being sung. Evidence to the contrary has come from Duncan himself; he has insisted his father could have sung the complete song if he had wanted to, but he preferred to tell the story and save the most meaningful part for singing. The evidence to support Duncan's testimony that his father was not singing a half-remembered song comes from the one hundred and two travellers from whom I recorded songs over the past ten years. Although every one mentioned that they had heard or had sung some narratives which they had since partially forgotten; whenever a song had been partially remembered (i.e., partially forgotten) in performance, the fact was always noted by them afterwards. Furthermore, immediately after singing the last phrase and in the same breath, a fragment would often be identified with a remark such as, "That's all I ken o't."

III.2. The Devil's questions. The narrative status of at least one ballad[7] recorded from travellers is enigmatic: was Child 3 ever an adequate story in the tradition? In the Blairgowrie berryfields in the 1950s, and in Aberdeen in the 1960s, Hamish Henderson recorded

versions of "The False Knight" (CH 3). All versions were described as fragmentary. (See Henderson, 1965, pp. 9 - 13.) Three of the four travellers from whom Henderson recorded this ballad fragment used the same tune as Johnnie Whyte, whom I recorded singing a comparable fragment in 1975 and 1978. See ex. 4. Johnnie's version is more blatantly sexual (note vv. 3, 4) than the other published versions, but his song was no longer than any of the others. But is it correct to call this song "a fragment?" Was there a longer song, a complete story, in the travellers' singing tradition?

Johnnie had explained that he'd learned the song from his mother (75/106/A4 and 78/108/A11), and he told me that she had travelled a regular circuit to Alyth and Blairgowrie (76/213/B2) — probably to join the berrypickers in the summertime. Thus Johnnie's version would seem to be a good example of the ballad as it might have been sung in Perthshire by the travellers. Each time after having sung his version, in 1975 and again in 1978, Johnnie immediately referred to a more complete song he couldn't remember. But in 1978 I asked him about the balance of the song and his reply included doubt about there being any more to the song,

L — Do you think there was more to it? Was there more questions?

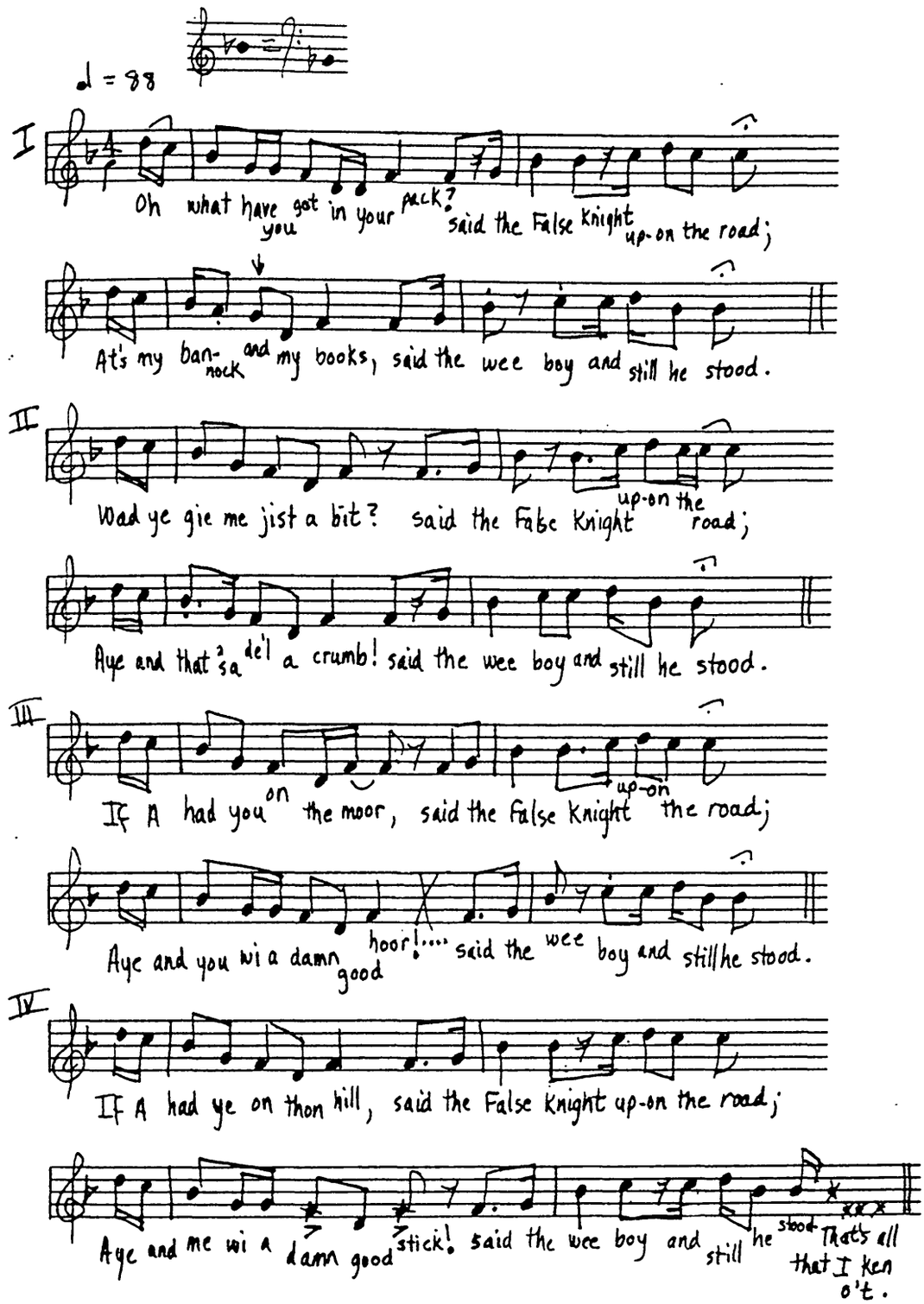
J — Mair questions 'n that, ye ken. But I suppose it was lost — how they mebbe met and what it was aboot more, mebbe.

L — Who did you hear that from?

J — Oh, I just heard that, it was one o ma mother's. I dinna ken if she kennt it all either.

(78/108/A11)

Example 4. Johnnie Whyte, "The False Knight upon the Road," 78/108/A. Complete song and explanation of the text.



L — Do you know what it's all about?

J — Ha-ha-ha! Well, it's supposed to be a wee laddie gaun tae school wi his bannocks and his books, his bannocks was his dinner .... the False Knight was supposed to be the Devil and he was tryin to get him, ye ken.

L — Did he get him in the end?

J — It's just what I tell ye — he was tryin to catch the wee laddie at the questions [repeats lines from the song].

(78/108/A11)

There is little reason to suspect that more of the story about the False Knight confronting the school boy ever existed for the travellers. This song may never have originated as a narrative i.e., with a complete plot structure. Coffin's research into the history of the song shows it is likely to have originated as a challenge song which "developed along more complex story lines" as it exerted its influence on balladeers. (Coffin, 1983, p. 36)

Why this song was not "a long song" in traveller tradition (as far as we have been able to ascertain) is most intriguing. Another devil ballad, Child 2, has been recorded from Perthshire travellers, and it is half again as long, and has been recorded as a complete narrative by John MacDonald for me and for Ewan MacColl (in song, 1967; and in speech plus song, 1975).[8] But in this ballad also, the beginning of the story is usually missing from the song text, as it has been recorded from Martha Johnstone (five variants, discussed in chapter five) and her son Alexander Reid (cf. ex. 15, chapter V), and Andra Stewart (re. SS 9, 1965, p. 6) — all from Perthshire. Is there any significance in the fact that neither of these two devil ballads show any indication of their complete narratives ever having been sung? Was the False Knight taboo to speak about? Were his dialogues with the "wee laddie" going to school and the "farm girl" going

for a walk meant to be sung because His riddling was too powerful to say in speech?

> Duncan — Oh, there's hundreds o tales about the Devil, hey?
> Martha — Oh dear, I dinna like His name! [Laughs]
> Linda — No. Cog! [cant = devil]
> M — [Laughs] I'm no holy but I dinnae like His — His name.
> D — Mmmm. . . .
>
> (DW and MJ after a devil story, 77/146/A1)

III.3. Speaking the Point of a Long Song

The converse of singing the most meaningful part of a story in a narrative performance, is speaking the point of a song. Sung narratives with spoken last lines have been recorded in Ireland, noted as a practice of sean-nos singers by Ó Canainn (1978, p. 80), and the older folk singers in North Derry by Shields (1981, p. 30). Both Shields and Ó Canainn have interpreted spoken endings as audience directives.

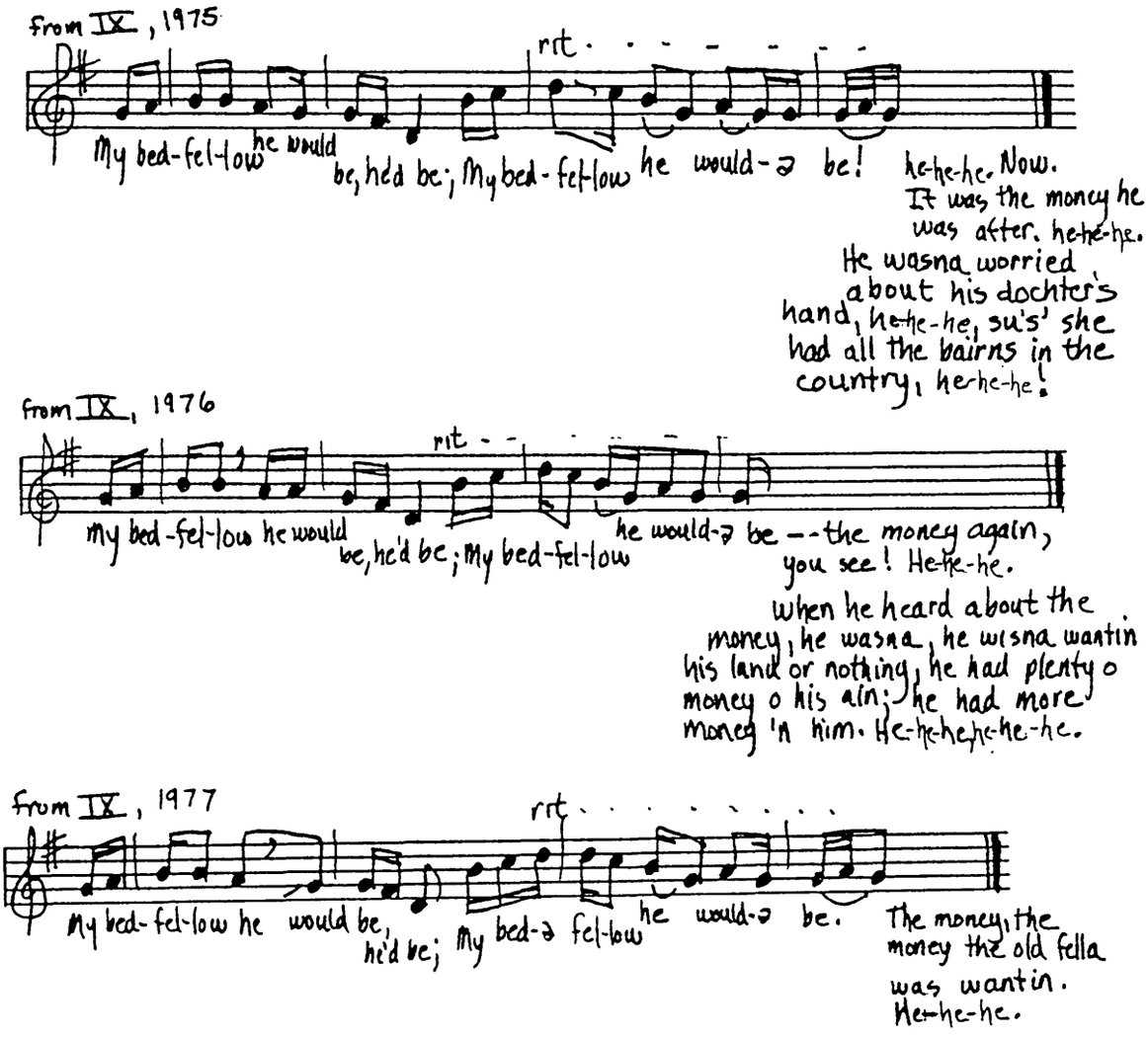
> When the sean-nos singer of today speaks the last few words of the song, instead of singing them, he is telling his audience that all is over, that he is bringing us back down from the heights of our involvement in the sean-nos experience to the hard facts of everyday life.
>
> (Ó Canainn, 1978, p. 80)

Spoken endings were uncommon in travellers' performances, but were always performed for one narrative sung by Johnnie Whyte of Montrose. The spoken ending does not function like the spoken introduction or the spoken story before the song; it is not directly related to the singer's concern about his listeners not knowing the story or the legend. Johnnie Whyte was only recorded singing in natural, spontaneous, traveller ceilidh circumstances, where his audiences were always composed of his nearest relatives whom he had sung for all his

life, in addition to the author who was not given any special attention as an outsider — after our first meeting in 1975. The spoken last words of the song "John Barbro" were inspired by the singer's interpretation of the story, not the audience. Johnnie never failed to comment in speech and laughter on the greed of the father in his three recorded performances of "John Barbro."

See ex. 5.

Example 5. Johnnie Whyte, "John Barbro," ends of three performances, 75/106/A4, 76/214/A1, 77/140/A2.



Why did Johnnie speak about the greed of the father upon ending the song, every time he sang it? I never asked him, for I did not consider his spoken ending to this song extraordinary; it seemed integral to his version and I did not take notice of the speech at the time. (Framing a song with spoken introduction and spoken final comment is a frequent practice of Scots singers, and others.) Now we shall never know, but the father's greed might well have been an important theme to him — the interference of parents in their children's choice of mates and the parents' basic misunderstanding of the love relationship. For Johnnie never married, and eight of the ten narratives he sang me were about broken coutships or traumatic experiences in marriage. Johnnie may have been "signing" "John Barbro" every time he performed it, by speaking the moral point of the story.

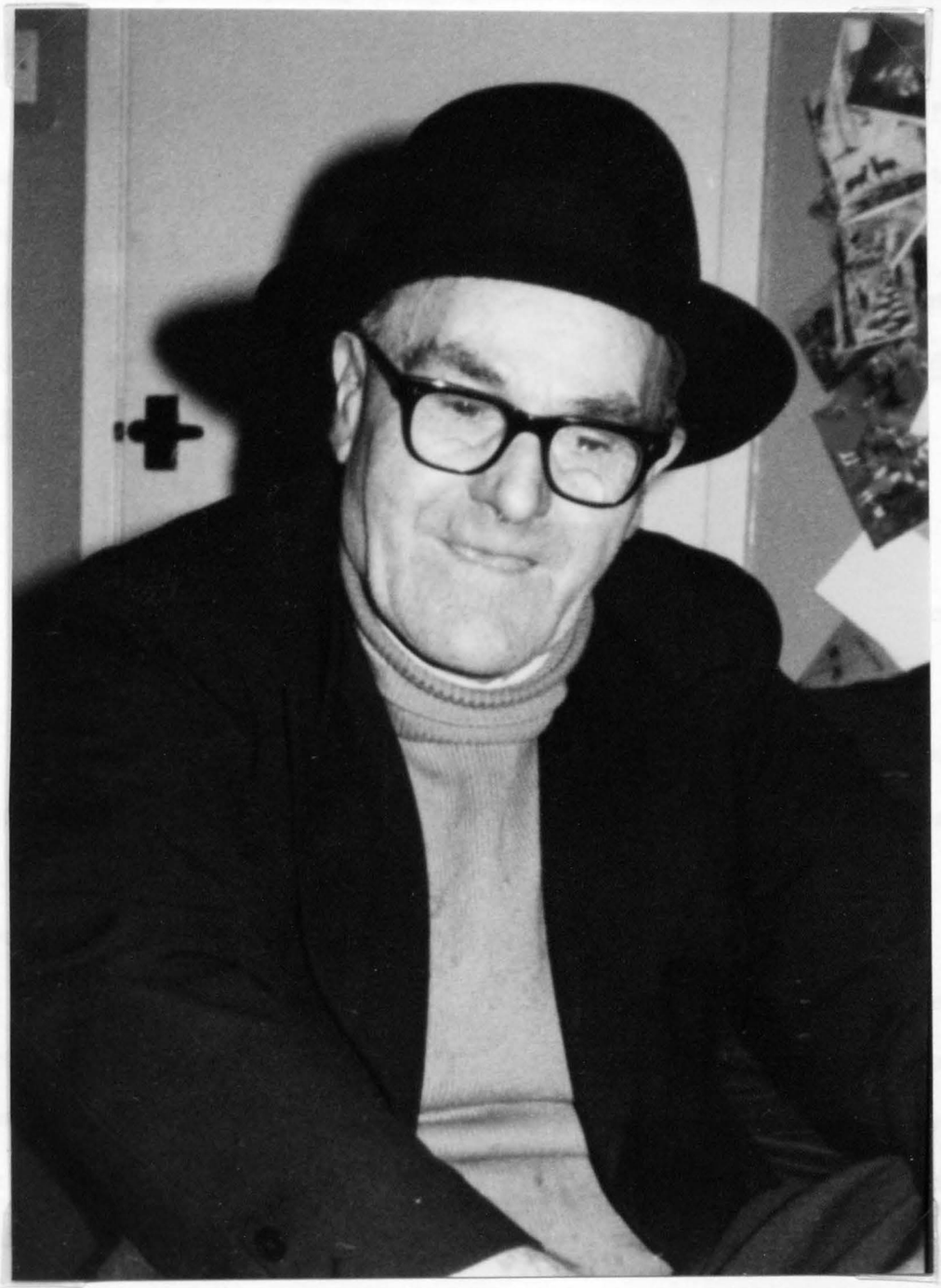


Plate 3. Johnnie Whyte sings a narrative on Hogmanay. Montrose, 1978.

III. Transmission

III.1 Sources of Narrative Songs

The theory of a purely oral transmission of narrative song in Scotland is not viable: Hamish Henderson has cogently argued that "there has for centuries been a constant fruitful cross-fertilisation in the fields of literary and 'folk' poetry in Scottish cultural tradition." (1980, p. 105) He has viewed Mrs Brown of Falkland, whose narrative songs were chosen by David Buchan and analyzed as exemplary models of oral re-creation in The Ballad and the Folk, as

> an outstanding exemplar of a type of creative literate folksinger which is one of the most characteristic types of folksinger on the Scottish scene .... in Lowland (or Scots-speaking) Scotland, we have been encountering this type of folksinger all the time [in the thirty years since the inception of the School of Scottish Studies].
>
> (1980, p. 106)

Among the Scots travellers, composed "literary" ballads may occasionally be sung, by literate as well as non-literate singers: "Lord Uillin's Daughter" (attributed to the authorship of Thomas Campbell) is sung by Duncan Williamson and incompletely by Bessie Whyte (see ex. 2, chapter three); both are literate. It was also recorded on one occasion by Peter Shepherd from non-literate traveller Martha Johnstone. But few of Martha's other thirty-three narrative songs may be traced to a specifically composed text. The historical ballads she sang, "Mill o Tifty's Annie" and "Bonnie Hoose o Airlie," may owe parts of their origins to lettered poets or singers, but it's more than likely that these narratives have been in the oral or popular tradition from the time of the actual incidents they chronicle. Thus

a kind of communal authorship might be proposed i.e., a community of singers from various sectors of society and perhaps from different periods of time, taken together, have "made" and transmitted these and other historical ballads right down to the present — resulting in different though similar versions for each particular narrative.[9]

Book versions of those narratives travellers heard regularly in childhood are generally distrusted by them. The song versions sung by members of a traveller's own family had different words and a less sophisticated language than book versions. In the majority, printed versions of ballads do not conform to the travellers' own sense of style — traveller singers can rarely make printed verses fit tunes they know, though of course exceptions may be cited. Jeannie Robertson has been reported by Gower (1983, p. 134) and Henderson as having resorted to books for missing, or forgotten, verses of songs she knew. Bessie Whyte (Montrose) has augmented the Whyte family version of "Jimmie Bracklow" (CH 203) with eleven verses from Child's "C" text. (78/107/A5)

The attitude towards printed versions similar to traveller family songs, or old songs, by some singers is notably condescending. Duncan Williamson had a derogatory opinion of a "Lochmaben Harper" text, fragments of which he had heard from his father, which he tried to sing from print, 76/31/A4. From the same song book, found by his sister-in-law in the local rubbish tip and without a title page, "Thomas the Rhymer" and the "Wreck of the Hesperus" were negatively criticized by Duncan.[10]

David Buchan has made a case for the "oral ballad" versus the written ballad, defining the former as "a genre of literature

whose very difference lies in the fact of transmission." (1972, p. 272) While the term "oral ballad" may be a misnomer for the ballad of tradition in Scotland, it might accurately denote the primary sources of narrative songs among the travelling people. For even when a narrative text sung by a traveller can be traced to a printed version, it should not be inferred that the printed text was the primary source for the traveller singer of that narrative. What may be hypothesized is that a traveller most likely learned a printed version of a song from another singer's performance — the singing of a literate shepherd, crofter, fisherman or busker. The following excerpt from an interview with Duncan Williamson on 28 July 1984 is pertinent:

L — Well, where did they get their songs from do you think?

D — Well, Linda, ... they prob'ly learned them along the way, maybe somebody come in and talked . . . to somebody in a pub and maybe had a drink with somebody and he says, 'Look, I'll sing you a song,' in a pub or a inn or a hotel. .... If the travellers were interested in something then they went to the end of the world to get that source o that thing. Say for instance that two traveller men went tae a pub for a drink, mebbe a inn .... And then they talk and they were singin to each other and some nontraveller man walked up — couldha been a farmer or a crofter, and he said, 'Look, boys, will you listen to this song?' And then they liked it! Then they like it; then they would pester, they would pester the life out o that man till he taught it to them.

....

L — Where did this happen besides the inns?

D — Happened markets, fairs, games, it happened all over the place! .... How 'bout the shepherd comin doun tae a camp [travellers' encampment] with fire at night, comin doun weary off the hill?

L — Would they!

D — Hey! And he seen this camp fire, all travellers gathered roon' the camp fire, the shepherd comin doun

fae the hill one night and a shepherd's always carried a wee, they carried their half-bottle in their bag, ye know! And he'd a couple o sooks oot his bottle comin doun. 'Ach, there's a puckle tinks,' he says, 'I'll hae to go doun an join them.' .... And the travellers said, 'Oh here's a gadgie bingin, mebbe he's the fairmer!'

'Och, I'm not, I'm just the shepherd,' he said. But to keep in good terms with the shepherd, the shepherd would put a good word in for them wi the fairmer, right? .... 'Och, dinna worry about these people, they're nice people, A was along wi them last night and A had a nice sing-song with them,' [he'd say to the farmer on whose ground the travellers were camped] ....

L — What other kind of people besides shepherds would be welcome?

D — Crofters, fairmers and shepherds and ploumen, ploumen comin back at night fae the bar with their bicycle and their tight troosers and their blue suit cyclin doun, fling'd their leg off their bike and said, 'Ach, thes is a few tinkers' camp, come on and we'll hae a wee crack to youse before A go home.'

....

L — Then what about buskers and street musicians?

D. — Buskers and street musicians? They brung them hame with them! The old traveller men met a busker or a street musician, he met him in the street. And he said tc his wife, 'Look, doll, I met this . . . this is the bonniest singer you ever . . . I met the day in the toon, he was singin and playin in the street' .... He brung the laddie back wi him to let his family hear what a good singer [he was] .

(84/40/B3)

It is conjecture, how much nontraveller singers have contributed to the travellers' narrative singing tradition. What can usually be determined, by direct questioning, is who the source singers were for any one traveller — especially of their old songs — for this category of songs was delimited by the "auld yins" who sang them. (See Appendix C for the oral sources of Martha Johnstone's and Duncan Williamson's narrative songs.)

III.2 Solo and Group Forms of Narration

The form of story transmission in the travellers' narrative tradition has and continues to be a solo activity, with a precise separation between narrator and listener(s). But the song tradition is different: it has and continues to be a social phenomenon, distinct from storytelling. Narrative singing has societal force because it is a form of music-making — with a potential for group interaction.

The act of "catching hands" while singing to someone, an intent listener or audience, is very much a part of the old song tradition. Some ballads were sufficiently deep and engaging, that those who remember having heard them for the first time, being sung to around the campfire, and again — time and time again while they were young with their fathers and mothers — cannot recount the experience without excitement. After Kintyre traveller John Townsley sang a four verse fragment of "Lady Margaret" (Child 39), his wife Isabelle exclaimed,

> When they [the older members of the family] were alive you always sang the songs — at night you could pick it up. When they had a drink they used to catch hands and sing songs — [we'd] take songs in. Around campfires in summer they would drink, sing, take hands and move back and forth. We'd be sittin and we'd be there listenin and you could maybe take it in! (75/42/B10)

Not only ballads, but also other family songs may be physically imparted to a listener, young or old, traveller or nontraveller friend — if the singer's performance effects the appropriate response of close attention. Usually it is the listener's hands which are "caught" but sometimes the singer may embrace the listener's knee (if he is sitting on a chair) from an adopted

kneeling position on the floor. Or singer and listener may encircle one another with their arms in more complete body contact. See plates 4 and 5.

Plate 4. Singer and listener encircle one another with their arms in close body contact. Duncan Williamson sings "Johnnie o Monymusk" (CH 114) for Nellie Stewart. Banchory, June 1978.

Plate 5. Catching the hands of a listener. As Duncan Williamson sings "Johnnie my Man," Katie Johnstone "takes it in." Montrose, July 1978.

Physical contact was not as vital to the transmission of narratives when they were told as stories. Travellers have a strict code of performance practice for storytelling. Silence must be maintained and an interruption from an older listener would evoke the retort, "Who's telling the story, you or me!" Children would be scolded or removed from the premises if they could not keep quiet during storytelling. A father would tell them, "I'll be the cause of your death if you don't be quiet while the old man's speaking!"

A narrative singer would not expect such disciplined restraint by his audience. Verbalized comments of support from a listener may be given if the listener senses the singer is making an extraordinary effort to recall or perform a long narrative and these do not necessarily disturb a performer. (cf. Douglas Stewart's encouraging remarks during Bessie Whyte's performance of "Young Johnstone," Hogmanay, 76/3/B4) And the participation of a listener in refrain songs is expected by some ballad singers. Duncan Williamson has indicated that refrains should be sung by listeners, thereby permitting the singer a moment of rest and preparation for the following verse in a narrative without loss of continuity in singing. (Interview, 2/84)

Solo singing of narratives by some traveller singers recorded may have been coincidental with the fieldworker's visits when members of a family happened to be absent. Nellie Stewart of Banchory was recorded singing solo when her older married daughters were not present, but if they were visiting her when the fieldworker was, then they sang narratives together: "Laird o Drum," 75/104/A6, and "Charlie Mackie" 75/104/A3.

Family performances by members of the nuclear unit in a household were not uncommon in my fieldwork research. Even when a father or mother sang solo, the children attended the singing so closely that when a word or line was forgotten, one or more of the children could and would prompt the singer without interrupting the tempo of the song. This practice was also noted by Ewan MacColl who commented on a "kind of communal participation which characterized the recording sessions he had with English and Scots travellers." (1977, pp. 12, 20)

Group Narratives. Some narratives in some families may have been traditional group songs. Both parents, John and Isabelle Townsley, sang a three verse variant of the bothy ballad "Jimmy Foyers" (MC 84) in unison during a visit to them in 1975, 75/42/B9. After singing it, John said it was one of "his mother and father's songs" and his wife added, "They used to sing it quite often." (75/42/B9)

"The Bonnie Lass o Fyvie" (GD 84) was sung as group performances by more than one traveller family visited. A five verse variant was sung in unison by everyone present — Katie Johnstone, her sister Bessie Whyte, Bessie's sons and daughters-in-law — at a spirited ceilidh in Katie's house. (75/99/B5) During another family ceilidh in Pitlochry with Bessie Whyte's cousin, Cathie MacQueen, the entire family, parents and three children, contributed to a dramatized ten verse variant of this military ballad.

Several narrative songs were given choral treatment by the traveller family of Townsleys in Clachan, Kintyre. "Erin go Bragh" (Laws Q20) was sung by six members of the family in December 1975, 75/42/B5; and by Marion, the oldest daughter, and her two brothers on a subsequent visit in February 1976, 76/43/B3. The four verse fragment of Child

39 was begun by father John during the first visit, with his wife and Marion joining in, 75/42/B10. John's brother Sandy and the children sang eight verses of "My Son Ronald" (CH 12), 75/43/A3. During the second visit in February 1976, four narratives were sung as duets, "Jimmy Foyers" (John and his wife), "Willie's Ghost" (a revenant night-visiting love song regarded by some travellers as a narrative[11]) (John and Marion), "Western Eurailway" (Marion and Uncle Sandy), and "Lord Ronald" (Marion and her mother).[12]

Solo narratives. Generalizing about the solo or group form of narrative song performance in traveller society is impossible at this stage of research. Evidence for the widespread practice of solo singing of narrative songs is very clear. In the extended Whyte traveller family in Montrose, the oldest singing members, Johnnie and Logie, were given full recognition for their songs and their individual, sometimes differing, interpretations of narratives.

Johnnie Whyte was only recorded in the company of his relatives and never in my presence were his narratives sung any way but as solo variants. The argument might be raised that his listeners did not accompany him because they were inhibited by my presence. The evidence is to the contrary. If his brother and sister-in-law, Bessie Whyte, who were his constant companions (because Johnnie never married he spent part of every day with his brother for companionship) had sung along with Johnnie regularly during his performances over the forty years of weekend ceilidhs the Whytes had held, then couldn't it be presumed, Bessie and Bryce would have known Johnnie's songs well enough to sing them alone? With the exception of one narrative, "Jimmy Brack-

low" (CH 203, see ex. 1, chapter 3), Bessie could not sing any of Johnnie's ten narratives completely. Bryce was unable to sing even parts of some of his brother's songs. Why? When I asked Bessie why she would not sing "Jimmy Bracklow" except on request, and other songs she had heard so very often from Johnnie and Logie (his sister), she replied, "Because they are Johnnie's songs." (Interview, 10/82) It was clear that a code of respect for the singer's own songs prevented her from singing them. Belle, Sheila and Cathie Stewart of Blairgowrie have a similar attitude towards each others' repertoires:

> Belle has taught her songs to the girls but if she feels that one of them sings a song better than she herself does, she will not sing it. In the Stewart family, there are 'my mither's sangs' (generally the big ballads, the bawdy songs, certain of the love-lyrics), 'Sheila's songs (some of the ballads, a number of Irish songs , the sad love-lyrics) and 'Cathie's songs (the Irish and more popular material).
>
> (MacColl, 1977, p. 20)

The following inference could be made: on some songs sung by traveller singers, including refrain ballads, singing along might be disrespectful — if the singer was a senior member of the family. Or, as Duncan Williamson has pointed out, "It might be impossible to sing along" on a narrative when an older singer with a fully matured style may take the liberty of changing words or phrases, linger on sustained tones or alter the melody of a strophe. (Interview, 2/83)

Chapter Three

THE TUNE AND A STANDARD STROPHE IN PERFORMANCE

The subject of my thesis is travellers' ballad singing, an activity of cognition and volition. The presupposition is that all traveller singers know what they are doing, are fully conscious of performing, and they perform narratives in song deliberately -- for reasons which I have outlined in chapters one and two. The focus of the study in this chapter and the following two is on melodic structure or strophic form in the singer's performance. The aim is to understand the form of the ballad tune in performance, how the traveller singer formulates the framwork or component parts of melody each time it is repeated from stanza to stanza in one song, and from performance to performance. I will begin with a discussion of some travellers' concepts of tune, to show that my concentration on strophic constructs accurately reflects the musical thought of those singers I have studied.

I. Tune Importance and Tune Identification

According to Johnny Whyte, knowing the tune is essential to learning a song text.

> See, the worst part o ony song is getting the proper air o a song. If you can get the air, you can near fit the words in as you go along. But if you're off the air, it disna matter if ye ken the words or no, ye canna sing it -- ye have to have the proper air.
>
> (JW, 78/107/A2)

And it is true for some ballads, their tunes will attract the attention of a learner before the words:

> When I was a bairn, I wadna learn a sang off my mither -- she'd plenty o sangs -- if the air wasna bonnie. I didna like it, though the words was guid. When I was a bairn the air caught my fancy first. I learned the air first, and I think if you get the air o a sang, the words are nae ill to learn. The words or the idea would come second. That's my opinion. And once you get the air in yir heid, then ye can easily learn the words ....
>
> (Jeannie Robertson, in Gower, 1968, p. 121)

But not all travellers would agree with Jeannie. Not all would consider the tune or the exact words of a ballad as essential as the story. Indeed, some travellers may not have heard fixed song texts or a fixed song for any one ballad. Some heard and remembered

the ballads as stories in the first instance.

Thus Bessie Whyte explained, "See, what you remember is the story of the song .... and then you put in yir ain words, what makes the story." (78/107/A2) She had been referring to travellers who were "quick to learn the song and then when they'd gone hame they'd forgotten some o the words." Duncan Williamson has also explained that the narrator's express purpose in telling the story of a song was that it should be positively remembered by a young traveller listener.[1]

> With a young audience, travellers five to twenty years of age, the old ballads would be told as stories sooner than being sung, because the narrator felt the story would be retained in a child's memory better that way. It is easier to remember a story than to remember a song.
>
> (DW, Interview, 1978)

Whether Duncan's or Jeannie's view represents the majority view of the travellers can't be said at this stage of research. But it is clear that some singers are attracted more to the tune of a ballad than to its story. Mrs Nellie Stewart's attitude was not atypical, "The story is not so important as the song — if it has a fine lilt, something to interest you to sing it, that's what I like." (75/189/A3)

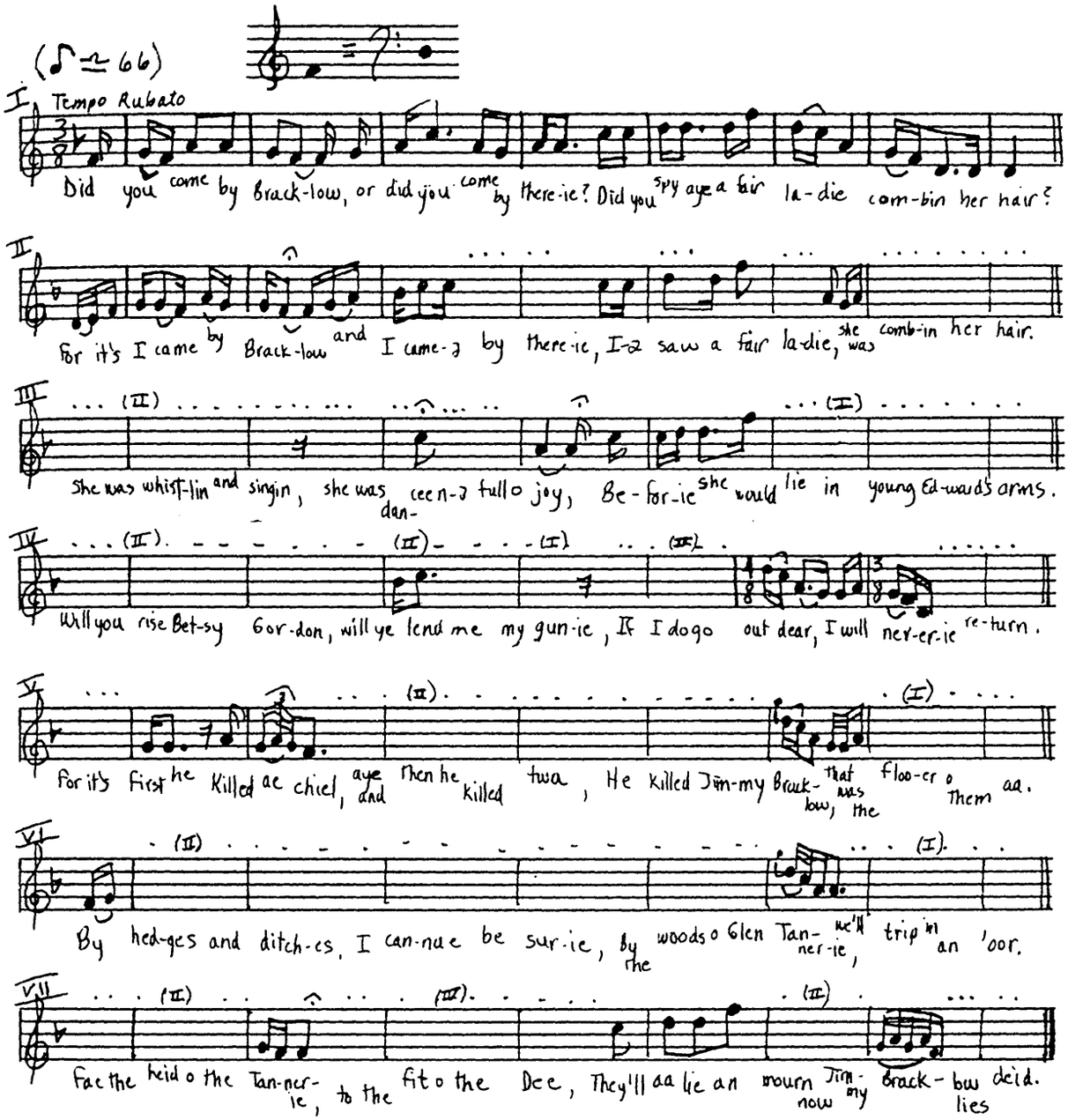
But there is another attitude. Neither words, story, nor music may be superior. When Herschel Gower pressed Jeannie Robertson to decide one way or the other which was more important, the music or the story of a ballad, she was adamant in her answer,

> JR — The music <u>and</u> the story. It's got to be a combination of both.
>
> HG — If it had to be that one was more important than the other, which do you think is the more important?

> JR — Well, the words, I suppose appeal tae people, and I suppose if it's a bonnie air appeals tae people. Both o them.
>
> (SS, 1968, p. 121)

In the travellers' tradition, ballads can be found which have a text or a tune lacking in some feature, e.g., coherence or regularity. In these cases, the weakness or want in one (either text or tune) is reciprocated by strength in the other. The relationship of words and music is often one of mutual benefit — verbal and musical forms are symbiotic in some ballads. For example, one narrative recorded on several occasions from 1975 - 1978, from three members of the Whyte family in Montrose (the two senior members and a sister-in-law), featured a text which two found confusing. Bessie Whyte and Logie MacQueen (one of the seniors) admitted to "not really knowing the story" or knowing much about "Jimmy Bracklow" (CH 203) (re. 77/150/A1, 75/105/A1). But they liked the tune and readily sang the song. Bessie was dissatisfied with the text to the extent that she searched for a "sensible" (re. 75/11/A3) text in Child and incorporated verses from his C version into the six-verse family version, 78/107/A5.[2] The oldest of the three singers who knew the narrative, Logie, was content to have an "idea" of the story upon which she re-created a prose account at the fieldworker's request, 75/105/A1. It is significant that this narrative has survived in the Whyte family repertoire of old songs despite an ambiguous text. For in diametric opposition to the text, the tune is memorable — tightly constructed, with a highly coherent strophe. See ex. 1.

Example 1. Johnnie Whyte, "Jimmy Bracklow," 75/106/B3, complete song (with first occurrence of variations) and complete text. CS



1 Did you come by Bracklow,
Or did you come by thereie?
Did you spy aye a fair ladie
Combin her hair?

2 For it's I came by Bracklow
And I came-ə by thereie;
I-ə saw a fair ladie,
She was combin her hair.

3 She was whistlin and singin,
She was danceen-ə full o joy,
Beforie she would lie
In young Edward's arms.

4 Will you rise Betsy Gordon,
Will ye lend me my gunie?
If I do go out dear,
I will neverie return.

5 For it's first he killed ae chiel,
Aye and then he killed twa;
He killed Jimmy Bracklow —
That was the flooer o them aa.

6 By hedges and ditches,
I cannae be surie;
By the woods o Glen Tannerie,
We'll trip in an 'oor.

7 Fae the heid o the Tannerie
To the fit o the Dee,
They'll aa lie an mourn now —
Jimmy Bracklow lies deid.

This ballad is a fine example of a traditional song that has been transmitted and remembered more for its tune than its story.

I.1. Melodic Entities or Ideas?

In traveller society the tradition of piping and instrumental music-making is strong and pervasive, so for instrumentalists tunes are important and often are separate entities. Singers who are recognized for their singing or for their songs are also competent in diddling or cantering, traditional forms of mouth-music, practices which help them keep tunes separate in their memories. According to Duncan Williamson the older travellers were zealous in their desire to learn new tunes. (85/1 / A2) Their musicality was not introverted, but rather characterized by extroversion relative to a high propensity for learning fresh material.

> The great thing among travellers was swapping tunes . . . a new tune would quiet them all. Tunes were passed on by the old ones diddling to the children, who then learned to diddle and play them on the chanter.
>
> (DW, 75/193/A1)

I.1.1. Different tunes. The recognition of "different tunes" was a widespread ability among the community because the men and women prided themselves on their knowledge of old songs or, if a piper, the tunes exclusively. As I have heard often the elderly travellers say, "It [their music and traditions] was all they [the old ones] had." (cf. Bessie Whyte, 78/108/A2) Bessie and Bryce Whyte had explained about the travellers' desire to learn new songs,

> They would stick to their own way [of a song] but would learn from one another as well, especially if they had never heard the song before. They liked to hear a new song; would listen to it for hours and hours.
>
> (75/191/A4)

That songs would be sung repetitiously for "hours and hours" suggests that some ballads or parts of the long songs, at least, would be heard with a recurring sequence of phrases i.e., sung to a strophe. Duncan Williamson has explained that travellers would repeat themselves when they were drinking while singing, although drinking was not a frequent occurrence in the many traveller families he knew.[3] (See fig. 1, introduction.)

MacColl noted that the singing of a succession of songs during one recording session to one tune was a "tendency" — especially in first stanzas of songs when a tenacious melody of one song previously performed would cling to the beginning of another. (1977, p. 22) Whether or not traveller singers would use one tune for a succession of songs in natural ceilidh circumstances, when a non-traveller wasn't present, is not known. The indiscriminate use of tunes for a succession

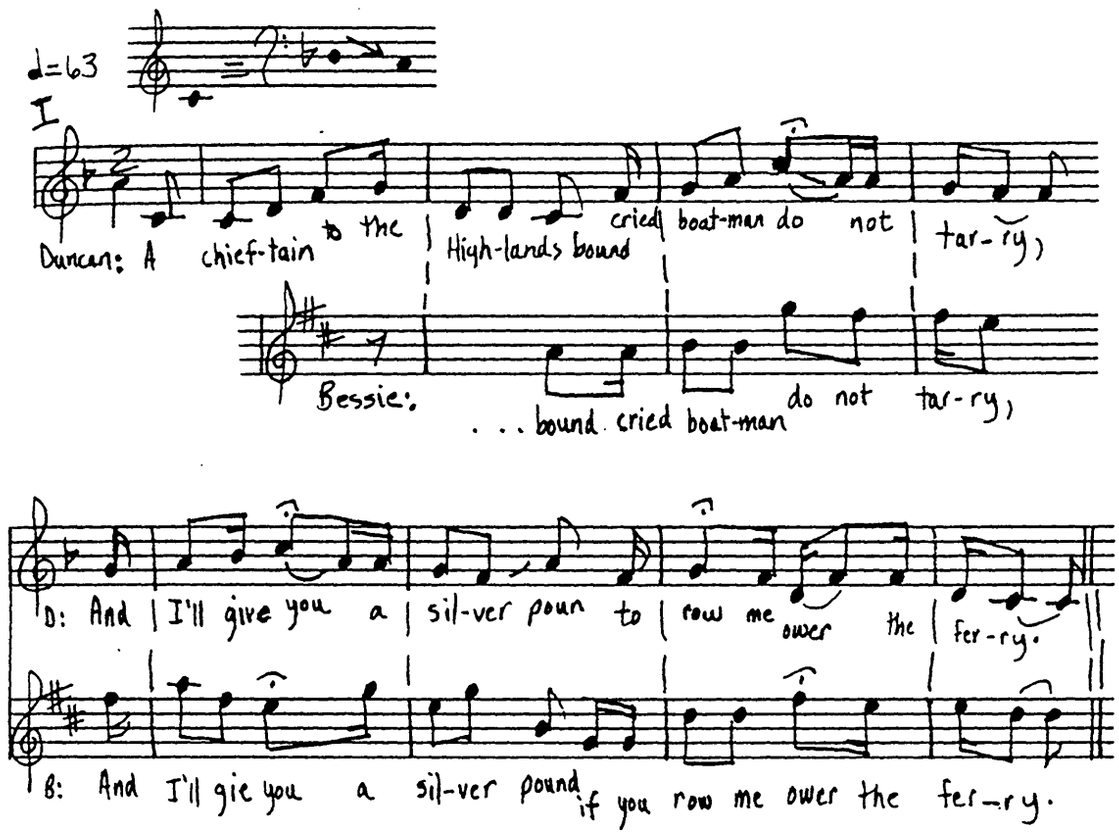
of songs was not a "tendency" I observed among the hundred singers I recorded, but this is not to say it would not happen. Martha Johnstone did in fact sing different narratives (as many as three) to the same melody (discussed in chapter five), but never more than two in succession during any recording session.

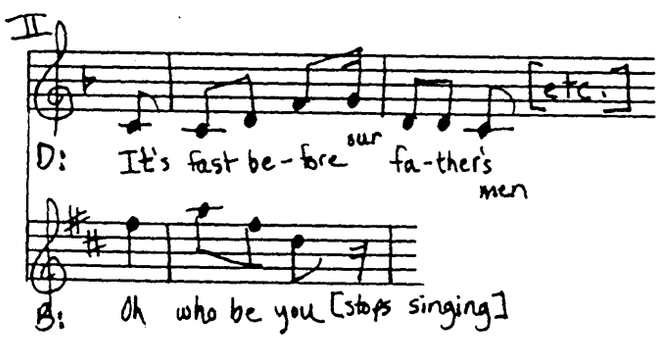
Many of my recording sessions were part of natural ceilidhs and visits, when more than one traveller sang or participated musically. And often it was the case that a singer's choice of tune was noticed by one or more members of his audience as "different" from the tune they knew or had heard his song sung to, and they commented on it. Indeed, an unacceptable tune choice for a song would be met with the retort, "Laddie yir words are aa richt but yir air's aa wrang!" The singer would then ask, "Well, let hus hear the way that you ken it!" The listener/critic, always an older traveller, might reply, "I'm nae singer, laddie, but A'll let ye hear a wee bit o the air the wey A ken it." The air would then be hummed, sung (with words) or diddled. But the old traveller would not expect the singer to change his own tune, only listen respectfully.

A fine example of one traveller's criticism of another's tune is Bessie Whyte's recognition of Duncan Williamson's tune for "Lord Uillin's Daughter" (text attributed to Thomas Campbell) as "a different air," the air to her family ballad, "Young Johnstone" (CH 88). Whenever Duncan sings "Lord Uillin's Daughter" in company with Bessie, she sings along, because she does not otherwise sing the song — she doesn't know the complete text. But when Bessie sings, she insists on singing her own tune, the "tune that I heard it." See ex. 2. The counterpoint of different tunes in a single performance is not typical,

however,[4] and in this case one participating listener is attempting to move the performer off her tune. Bessie's husband also notices it is wife's ballad tune, but he is tolerant of the "wrang air."

Example 2. Duncan Williamson, Bessie Whyte and Bryce Whyte, "Lord Uillin's Daughter," 76/148/B6-7. Complete performance with spoken interjections and Bessie singing along on some lines with a different air.





D — [continuing singing]

Three days we fled together,
And should they find me in the glen
My blood would stain the heather.

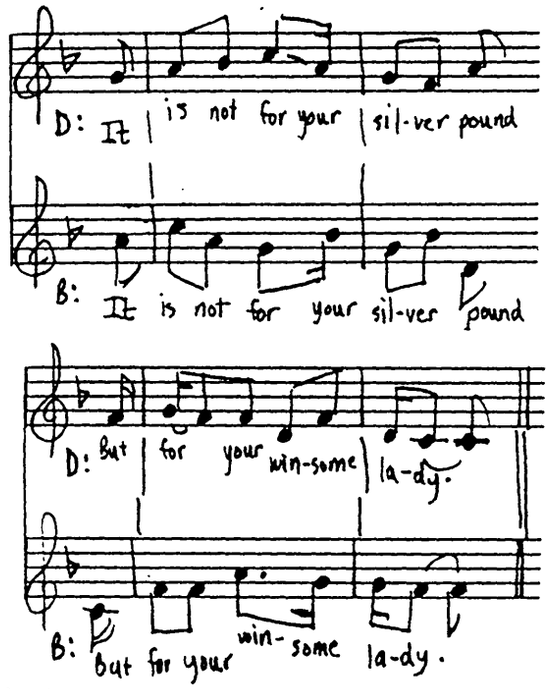
Br — Isn't it "Young Johnstone?"

D — [continuing singing]

3 Up spoke a hardy Highland wight
I'll go my chief, I'm ready;

Br — Linda, isn't it?

[Bessie joins in singing in Duncan's key —]



D — [singing alone]

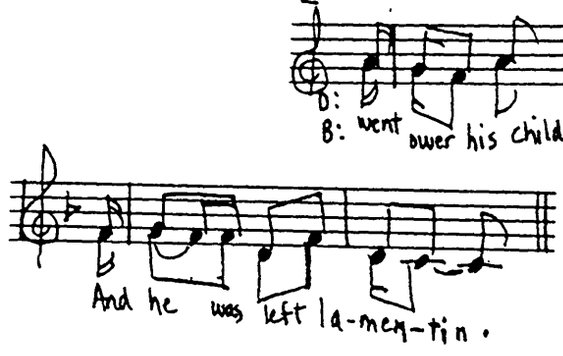
4 A ship has left a stormy land

Br — Duncan has the air o "Young Johnstone," isn't it?

A stormy sea before her,
When oh too strong for human hand
The tempest gathered ower her.

5 Lord U'llen leaves those fatal shore
His wrath was turned to wailin;
The waters wild

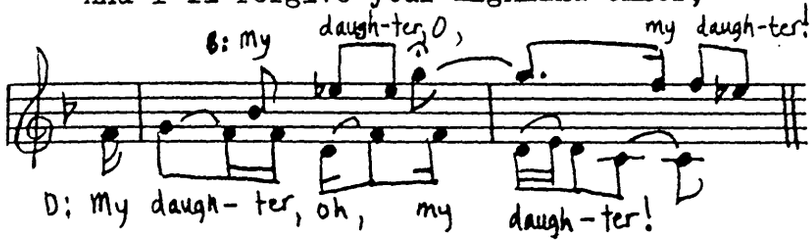
[Bessie joins with Duncan's tune —]



Br — Very good, Duncan.

D — [continuing singing alone, first three lines]

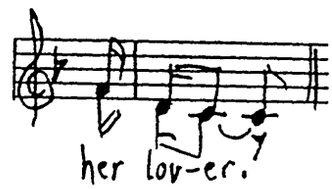
6 Come back, come back, Lord U'llen cried,
Across the stormy water,
And I'll forgive your Highland chief,



Br — You've got a different air
frae what he'd got.
He's got the air t' what—

D — [continuing singing alone]

7 There ra'es around, the waves were high,
One rarm was round her lover;
One lovely hand was stretched for aid
And one was round
[with Bessie:]

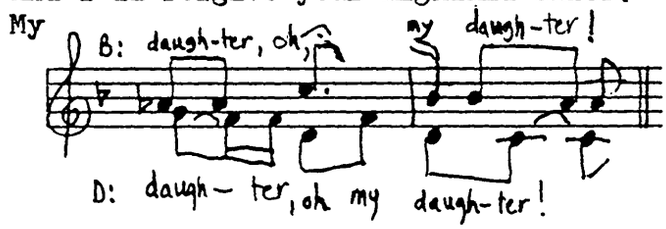


D — [continuing singing alone until the last line of vs. 9]

8 The ship has left the stormy sea,
A stormy land before her,
When oh troo long for human hand
The tempest gathered ower her.

Bes — A must get that.

9 Come back, come back, Lord U'llen cried,
Across the stormy water,
And I'll forgive your Highland chief.



D — [continuing singing alone]

10 Lord U'llen reached his fatal shore,
His wrath was turned to wailin;
The waters wild went ower his child
And he was left lamentin.

Bes — I must get that.

Br — Very good, Duncan, that's very good. ....

Bes — A ken.

D — That's "Lord Uillin's Daughter."

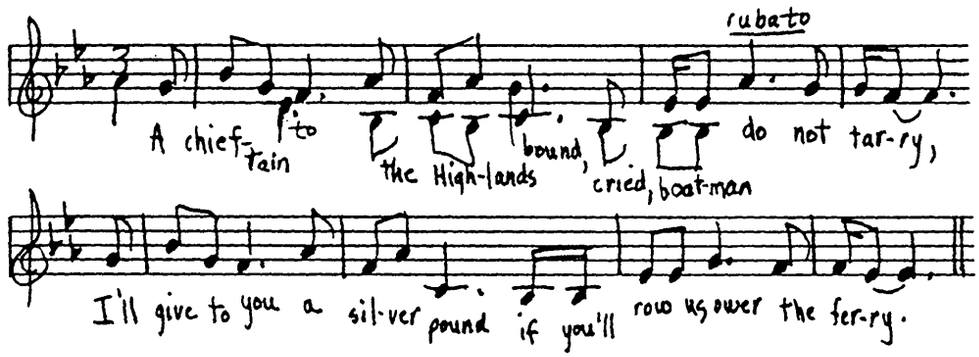
B — Ah, but that's not the tune that I heard it to.

Br — That's the tune that he's got there . . .

Bes — Aye, that's the tune they've got.

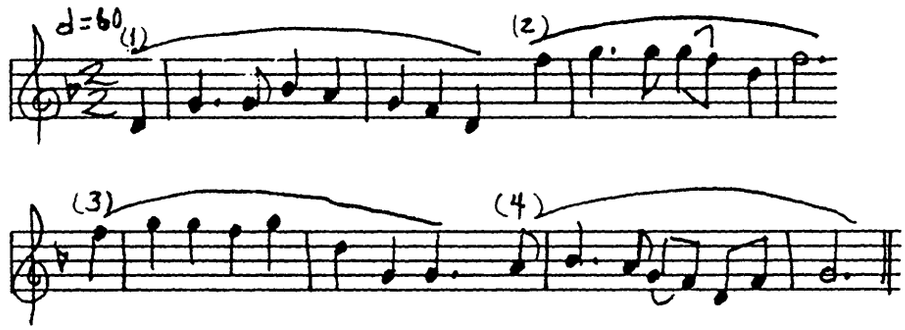
L — Well, what's the tune that you have, Bessie?

B — [sings the following tune with variants to three verses]

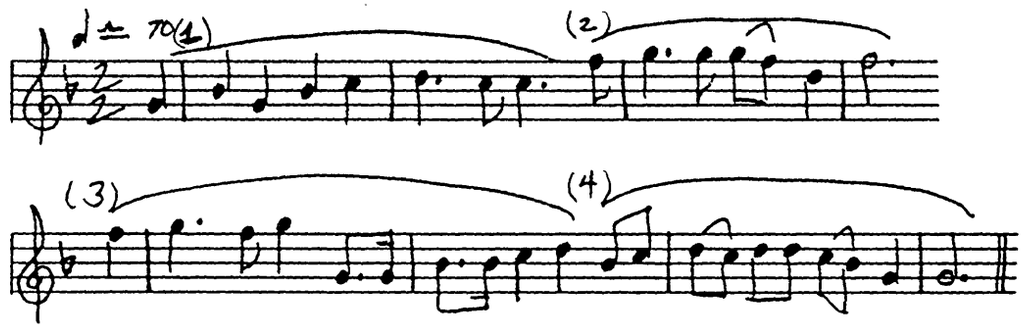


I.1.2. Similar tunes. Duncan Williamson has used the term "similiar" [sic] to describe tunes that sound alike to him and which are "so close together" that he sometimes has difficulty establishing the right form of the tune for a particular ballad. In Tocher 33 (1980, p. 159), Alan Bruford defined the following two strophes as two "different tunes." Duncan sang "Lady Margaret" (CH. 39) to the first standard strophe, A, in 1976 (and also in 1984, transcribed as ex. 11, chapter four); and to the second standard strophe, B, in 1977:

A



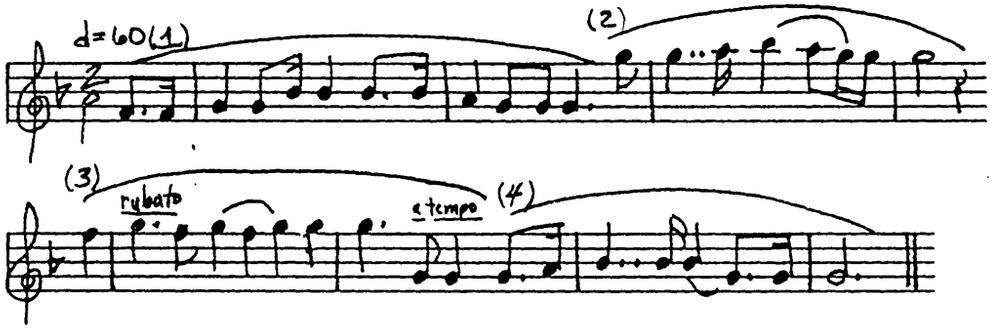
B



According to Duncan, these are virtually the "same" tune, and they may appropriately be termed "variants" of the "Lady Margaret" tune idea. He can contemplate both tunes on the same occasion and sing first one, to one episode of the story, and then switch to the other.

The two variants are exactly like each other in their second phrases; the first motives of their third phrases are also the same. The tunes have another structural similarity. In each, across the strophic boundary, phrases one and four form an organic whole respectively. (1) in A is an arch; (4) is its inversion. (1) in B ascends by skips (of a m3) and steps from the tonic (g) to the dominant; (4) descends by steps and a skip (of a m3) from the dominant (d) to the tonic. It is interesting that the different ambits of each and the different contours of three of the four phrases do not make the two tunes "different" for Duncan.

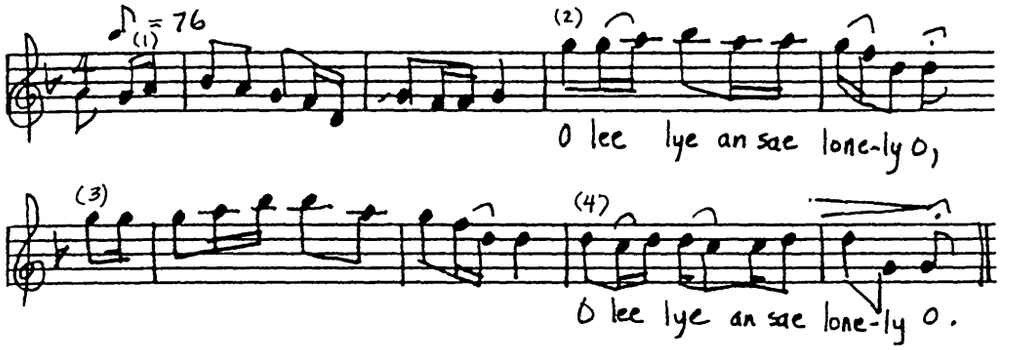
Another of Duncan's fairy ballads, "True Thomas" (CH 37) (77/147/B3, transcribed in Tocher 27, pp. 175 - 178), is sung to another variant of the "Lady Margaret" tune. Duncan has testified to hearing this ballad sung (Ibid.) but not to the tune he uses for it; his tune, below, was created on the analogy of the "Lady Margaret" A variant:



(1) and (3) are the same as the corresponding phrases in "Lady Margaret" A. (2) and (4) repeat (1) at the octave and on the same pitch.

Another tune which could be considered a variant of this "fairy" group is Duncan's air for "Hind Horn" (CH 17), transcribed as ex. 2 , chapter two. Like "True Thomas's" tune, two of the phrases were repeated, but in this strophe it is (2) and (3) which

repeat. (1) is exactly the same as "Lady Margaret's" (4) in the A variant. (4) in "Hind Horn" is equivalent to the third phrases of "Lady Margaret" A and "True Thomas." See below. But significantly, Duncan does not consider the "Hind Horn" tune similar to the other three. This is probably because of the tune's interlaced refrain and the rhythmic articulation of each beat, a pervasive dactyllic metre.



II. The Tune Performed: A Theory of Variation

How a singer performs a melody, i.e., sings a ballad, such that every repetition of the tune (beginning and ending coincident with verses of the text) is new, may be defined as "variation." Ewan MacColl worked directly with traveller singers, seven in England and eleven in Scotland. His conclusions about variation, the melodic 'alterations' from performance to performance of tunes by

individual singers and a singer's 'employment' of different types of variations(s) in the course of a song (1977, p. 17) are in accord with my own theory. Variations are the consequences of a singer's control of melody in performance. The degree of control is not always the same, but may fluctuate from performance to performance or within the course of a song. The theory does not aim to undermine the element of spontaneity in narrative song performance. For the singer does indeed respond freely to the essential story (cf. Lord, 1960, pp. 105, 117 and passim; also Buchan, 1972, p. 163) each and every time he performs it; and he adapts the story and the melody to the requirements of each performing situation, his particular audience and their needs as he perceives them. But the key factor in the theory is that variation depends on the singer's musical awareness, the consciousness of melody. MacColl has also concluded that variations are far from being the products of "unconscious minds" (cf. Sharp, EFS, 1936, pp. 18, 34; Hendren, 1936, pp. 39, 54, 59; and Gerould, 1937, p. 187).

> .... variations are neither accidental nor incidental. They are extremely important, not merely because each performance is unique, but because they represent a singer's attitude towards his or her craft and towards the transmission of an inherited culture.
>
> (MacColl, 1977, p. 17)

II.1. What is the Tune Performed?

The form of a melody during performance is not rigid but protean. In the melodic form, what changes and what does not change? How and why are such modifications made or not made by singers? Answers

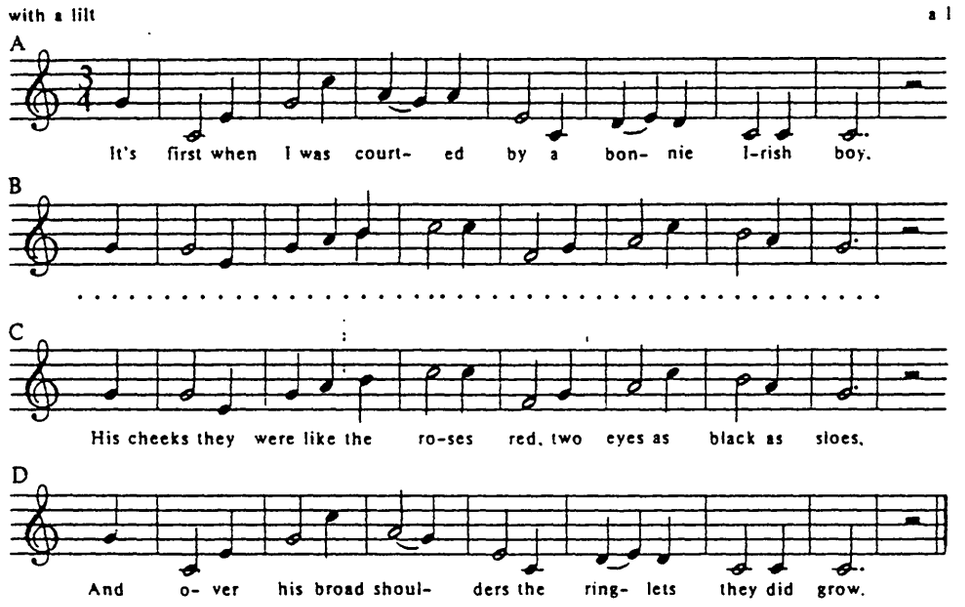
to these questions are prerequisite to comprehension of the 'tune' as it is actually sung.

II.1.1 An empirical study. The method of the study is empirical. Analysis of the tune as it has been actually performed is the point of departure for the thesis. My approach differs significantly from conventional studies of ballad texts and tunes e.g., MacColl's Travellers' Songs (1977), Bronson's Traditional Tunes (1959 - 1972) and the Singing Tradition (1976), Child's English and Scottish Popular Ballads (1882 - 1898), Keith's Last Leaves (1925) and Karpeles' edition of Cecil Sharp's Collection of English Folk Songs (1974 - 1975). In this author's thesis, an authoritative version of a tune in print or anywhere outside the performer's own singing is not presumed. Hence, none of my transcriptions bear the usual markings of editorial interference — the dotted lines indicating "omission" on the part of the singer in his verses or his tunes. Such dotted lines of omission are not based on the authenticity of the singer's performance; they stem in most cases (unless otherwise documented) from a transcriber's desire to show a tune or text as he or she thinks it should have been sung, or might have been sung if the singer had had more complete knowledge or more accurate knowledge of the song he has sung. See the example below (ex, 3) for an illustration of editorial interference; for in this case, Charlotte Higgins never once sang the quadriphrasal form of the tune MacColl has presented as her song. If the singer had testified to missing a line or not having performed his "normal tune," as John MacDonald had said after one performance (re. MacColl, 1977, p. 22); then there is every good reason to show an omission in the transcription. However, it is my contention

that adding such marks of omission to a singer's song is wrong because it falsifies the performance, obliterates its integrity.

I follow the travellers' lead by insisting on observable or aural facts or events. They value experience of music, the actual performing of songs and tunes. Their judgment and assessment of each other's musical ability are guided by the sound patterns that are given, the sounds as they may be experienced.

Example 3. Charlotte Higgins, "Bonnie Irish Boy" (Laws P26), in MacColl, 1977, pp. 218 - 219.



Note: In verse 1, Mrs Higgins goes without hesitation from line A to line C.

1 It's first when I was courted by a bonnie Irish boy,
. . . . . .
His cheeks they were like the roses red, two eyes as black as sloes,
And over his broad shoulders the ringlets they did grow.

2 He courted me for his own true love, his heart's delight and joy,
But he breaks the hearts of all fair maids wherever that he goes.

3 But now he's gone and he's left me to wander all alone,
But I'll bundle up my clothing, in search of him I'll go.

4 . . . . . .

I'll wander east, and I'll wander west and I'll wander all alone,
And when I'm tired and wearied I'll just sit doon and cry,
And I'll think of all the joys I spent with my bonnie bold Irish boy.

5 There's one request I'm going to ask before I'm dead and gone,
You'll carry my bones to Ireland and there you'll lay them down.

6 You'll write upon a small stone to the passers who pass by:
'I die brokenhearted for the love of an Irish boy.'

II.1.2 The standard strophe in performance. On the basis of the empirical evidence, it is possible to determine a "standard strophe" in most performances of narrative songs by travellers. This "standard strophe" is the form of the melody which recurs regularly or for a majority of the stanzas in a song. Some narratives, not many, were sung without a definitive stanzaic form and these will be discussed in chapter five.

From here on, the term "variant" is reserved for the kind of variation which is evidently a musical equivalent, an optional choice for the singer — because he has established its structural efficacy in regular or frequent usage during a performance or from performance to performance. The term "variant" is not applied to occasional or inconsistent variation, improvisatory passages or mistakes. See below.

II.2. Classes of Variation

There are four classes of variation which can be distinguished according to one of four possible origins during the singer's performance of a melody in song. 1) A variation may originate in error. In

this case the singer either makes amends for the mistake, correcting the error — usually a wrong pitch or a textual anomaly, adjusting subsequent pitches, rhythms or words; or he comments on the mistake after the performance. 2) A "variation" may have been learned as part of the complete song; it may have become a fixed irregularity in the singer's version of the song (discussed in detail in chapter four). 3) A variation may originate as an improvisation, on the basis of those tunes, phrases, motives or figures the singer knows. 4) A variation may originate in the singer's formal knowledge of musical alternatives for individual events.

II.2.1 Mistakes. The singer's errors and the way they are rectified often show what structural units the singer works with in performance. Structural units can be any or all of the following: a) individual pitches; b) figures, consisting of at least one characteristic rhythm and one characteristic interval; c) motives, half-phrases usually; d) phrases, often though not always coincident with verse lines; e) half strophes, delimited by the tune's medial and final cadences; f) whole strophes, coincident with the song verse; or g) groups of phrases, musically unified and coincident with story episodes or dramatic scenes.

II.2.2 Fixed irregularity. A structural variation does not necessarily imply impromptu composing, for the "variation" may be found in every performance of a particular narrative by a singer. The "set irregularity" class of variation is dependent upon a concept of fixed-form song — a song that has become "fixed" with regular and frequent performances, the process of "gelling" as described by Hamish Henderson.[5] But it is possible that a singer's version of a song may regress or "dissipate" (Henderson, 1980, p. 86) with infre-

quent performing. It is impossible to determine whether a song version is "fixed" or "variable" without recourse to recordings of diachronic performances and this class of variation is not readily discernable.

II.2.3 Improvisation. Roger Abrahams compared the traditional singing of Almeda Riddle to jazz performing, but he made the distinction,

> .... that the jazz artist is consciously and intentionally seeking variation as a creative means of expression while the traditional performer produces variations in an unintentional or subconscious but nonetheless creative way.
>
> (1970, p. 161)

The "subconsciousness" of a singer's process of variation simply can't be studied empirically. And it is for this reason that I hesitate to accept the theory that variation in particular is beneath the singer's conscious awareness; as Bronson stated, "Within a tradition, variation is almost subliminal." (TTCB, I, 1959, p. xxv) When one learns to comprehend a singing tradition and comes to understand the purposes of singers' performances, then it seems to be missing the point of musical performance to relegate the "creative way" of varying to the domain of the subconscious — outside the range of attention! The class of variation which may usefully be termed "improvisation" is the extemporaneous formulation of music in performance. Some improvisatory performances or parts of performances are readily discernable because of their high(er) degree of variability or the singer's display of effort as he "works" to express or re-construct a narrative within the restrictions that are his tradition. See, for example, Duncan Williamson's first performance of the complete story of "Lady Margaret" (CH 39) in versified song, 77/149/A5,[6] before his version had "gelled" with the addition of lines and motifs learned from his second

cousin Robbie Townsley in October 1982.

II.2.4. Musical alternatives, variants. This class of variation includes the most positive examples of the singer's musical control over a song as it is being sung. The singer who makes use of musical variants at any structural level (pitch, figure, motive, phrase, strophe or phrase-group) is a performer affected primarily by the act of music-making, specifically the singing he or she has done so far. He or she is a singer who constantly interacts with the song as they re-produce it and also as they have already re-produced it — referring to previously heard or sung variants in their memory. What is actually sung is the product of this interaction, choices between musical alternatives for structural events. See section four below.

III. Establishing a Standard Strophe

It is not unusual to find travellers singing narratives to a well defined tune from the very start of a performance. Johnnie Whyte never sang anything but his definitive version of a tune from the very first strophe of a narrative song, and only once in a recording session did he have difficulty recalling the start of a tune — when his brother Bryce immediately offered assistance by singing the first phrase ("Young Emily," 76/213/A2). Now in Johnnie's case, the singer had a fixed, pre-meditated idea of a narrative tune in his mind; and this "tune model" led the singer in his delivery of a song. Johnnie's ten recorded narratives were fixed verbally as well, and we may conclude his narrative songs were memorized.

But there are many travellers who don't begin songs with a clear definition of the tunes, and it can be inferred that they do not have

the completed song or tune in mind all at once, right from the very start of a performance. But it should be made clear, a traveller singer will not attempt to sing a song unless he or she thinks positively in advance — before performing — that a complete song can be recalled in performance. This is a most important point, for I have never met a traveller who would ad lib a song, fabricate a text or story or tune and call it an "old song." Martha Johnstone was not adverse to improvising on old songs i.e., to provide narrative performances in song extemporaneously for the occasion of my visits or other traveller visitors. But she adamantly refused to perform narratives or songs if she was not confident of remembering them completely. She would not improvise on something she didn't think she knew adequately to perform it properly. For example, about the devil story "Waiting for One and Two passed by" (Laws M34?), Martha said it "was an awfae good song, an awfae good story" to Hamish Henderson in 1957. But when he tried to persuade Martha to sing even a phrase, she exclaimed, "I wadnae want tae make a fool o't!" (57/8) There were at least five "good songs" Martha spoke about which she would not sing because she knew she could not, and would not, remember them in song. And we may deduce from her concern for the integrity of the song, that those songs Martha did perform were ones she did know and did remember — completely, unless she commented on them otherwise. (The point of this diversion on Martha's memory and her attitude towards performing a remembered song, is that we cannot presume to criticize an unclear formulation of the tune as "memory failure" on the part of the singer. We should give the singer the benefit of the doubt in every case and seek for explanations of unusual

cr unconventional phenomena in music which will conform to the singer's own understanding or interpretation of the event.)

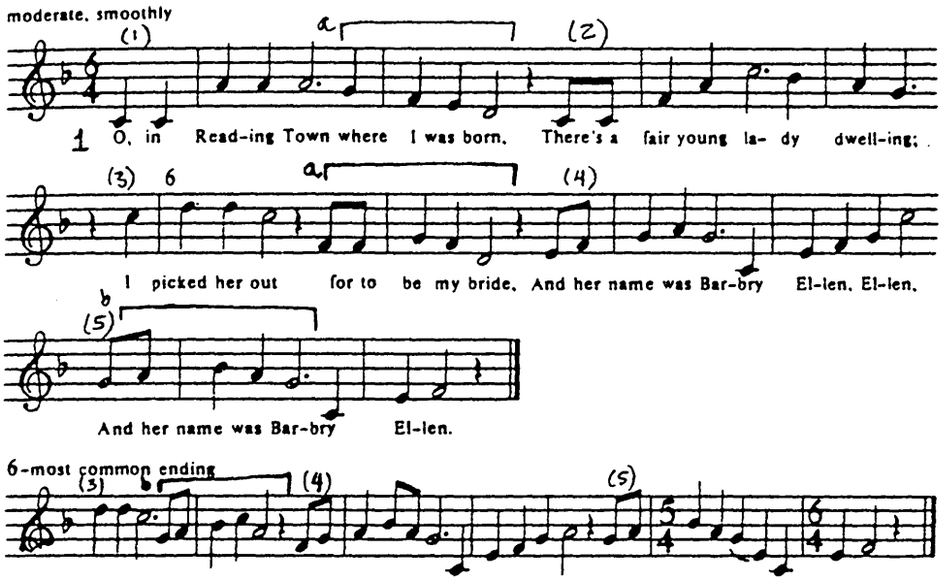
Maud Karpeles was one musicologist who commented on the frequency with which songs performed by the folk are begun with a strophe that cannot be called the regular form of the tune: "It will often be found that the first few stanzas are irregular or indefinite and that it is only after a few stanzas have been sung that the melody is crystallized, so to speak." (1958, p. 27) Among the travellers, MacColl noted the same practice,

> Many of the singers would get into a tune gradually, arriving at a definitive melody by perhaps a second or third stanza. Stability might never be achieved if the song had only two or three stanzas.
>
> (1977, p. 22)

What is evident from the analysis of narrative songs performed by some travellers is that some songs, or some strophes within songs e.g., the first one or two, are musically constructed phrase by phrase, with each re-created phrase affecting the further process of re-creating as the singer's mind interacts with the intermediate stages of construction. Examples from five travellers will be cited to illustrate this re-creative process.

Caroline Hughes, MacColl's chief English informant, sang two narratives which began with unclear formulations of their respective tunes. Child 43 was presented in MacColl's collection with the music of verse two because the first strophe was variable and "the melody did not stabilize until verse two." (1977, p. 65) Unfortunately MacColl did not show the music of verse one. But for Child 84, Caroline's "Barbry Ellen," MacColl has shown the first strophe and an additional three phrases labeled "most common ending." See ex. 4.

Example 4. Caroline Hughes, "Barbry Ellen," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 76 - 77.



2 Now, mother dear, you make up my bed,
You'll make it soft and easy;
That I might die for the sake of love,
And that she might die for sorrow, sorrow,
And that she might die for sorrow.

3 Now, mother dear, you'll look up over my head,
You'll see my gold watch standing;
There's my gold watch and my guinea gold ring,
Will you 'liver it to Barbry Ellen, Ellen?
Will you 'liver it to Barbry Ellen?

4 Now, mother dear, look at the side of my bed,
You'll see a bowl there standing,
It is full of tears that I've lost this night
For the loss of Barbry Ellen, Ellen,
For the loss of Barbry Ellen.

5 Now, as I were a-walking across the fields,
I met a corpse a-coming;
(O, you put down, my six young lambs) (O, put him down, my six young lads?)

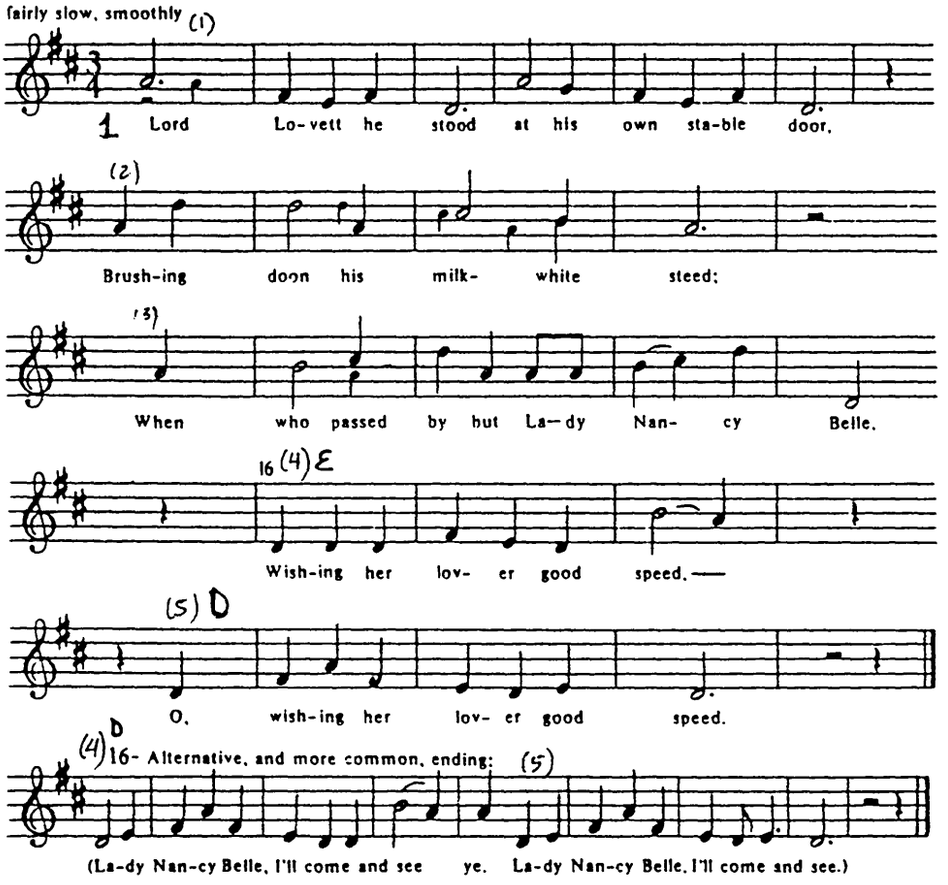
That I might well gaze on him, on him,
That I might well gaze on him.

6 While (strollily) I walkèd on, (strollèd I, strolling there?)
I heard the (knell a-telling), (bell a-tolling?)
And as it tolled, O, it seemed to say:
'Hard-hearted Barbry Ellen, Ellen,
Hard-hearted Barbry Ellen!'

It can be observed from this layout that the last half of Caroline's melody was not formed precisely until she had sung (5), the refrain phrase; the second motive of (3) was not fixed in the singer's mind before singing. She had to sing the refrain, which evidently was fixed melodically in her mind, before a correct (3) and (4) could be sung for II and thereafter.

The very same process was evident in Charlotte Higgins' performance of Child 75, see ex. 5. The "more common ending," (4), was not sung in strophe I; but was recalled properly only after the refrain burden, (5), had first been sung.

Example 5. Charlotte Higgins, "Lord Lovett," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 71-2. Copy of the tune only.



Bronson had commented on the fourth phrase of many ballad tunes being "strongly conditioned by its approach to the concluding tonic." (TTCB, I, 1959, p. xxvii) And one might deduce that singing the last phrase of a tune would help a singer establish a standard strophe for a performance; because once the tonality of a tune has been firmly established, then the precise contour of separate phrases within the melody becomes clarified. This might be one explanation. But Bronson may have over-emphasized the "tonality" factor in a ballad tune. The traveller singer's response to a "tonic" might be different from the response of a trained musicologist. We don't know what the traveller's "tonic" might be for certain songs.

MacColl has come closer to a plausible explanation for how a traveller singer could define his tune within the short interval of one or two strophes. He wrote, "Occasionally, if a singer could not recall the correct melody, he would substitute another tune of the same metre, mode and general feeling. This is not a practice confined to travellers." (1977, p. 22) In short, the singer does not just sing anything that pops into his head when he cannot produce the correct form of the tune for a song. He sings something he thinks compares to the tune and has a metre and mood that fits the proper tune. Duncan Williamson has described this process, this conscious activity, "It is like taking a 'slip-road' to the main route;" (Interview, 17/2/85) it is like a tributary to the river. But the 'slip-road' is a carefully chosen passage and controlled so that it leads into the proper form of the tune.

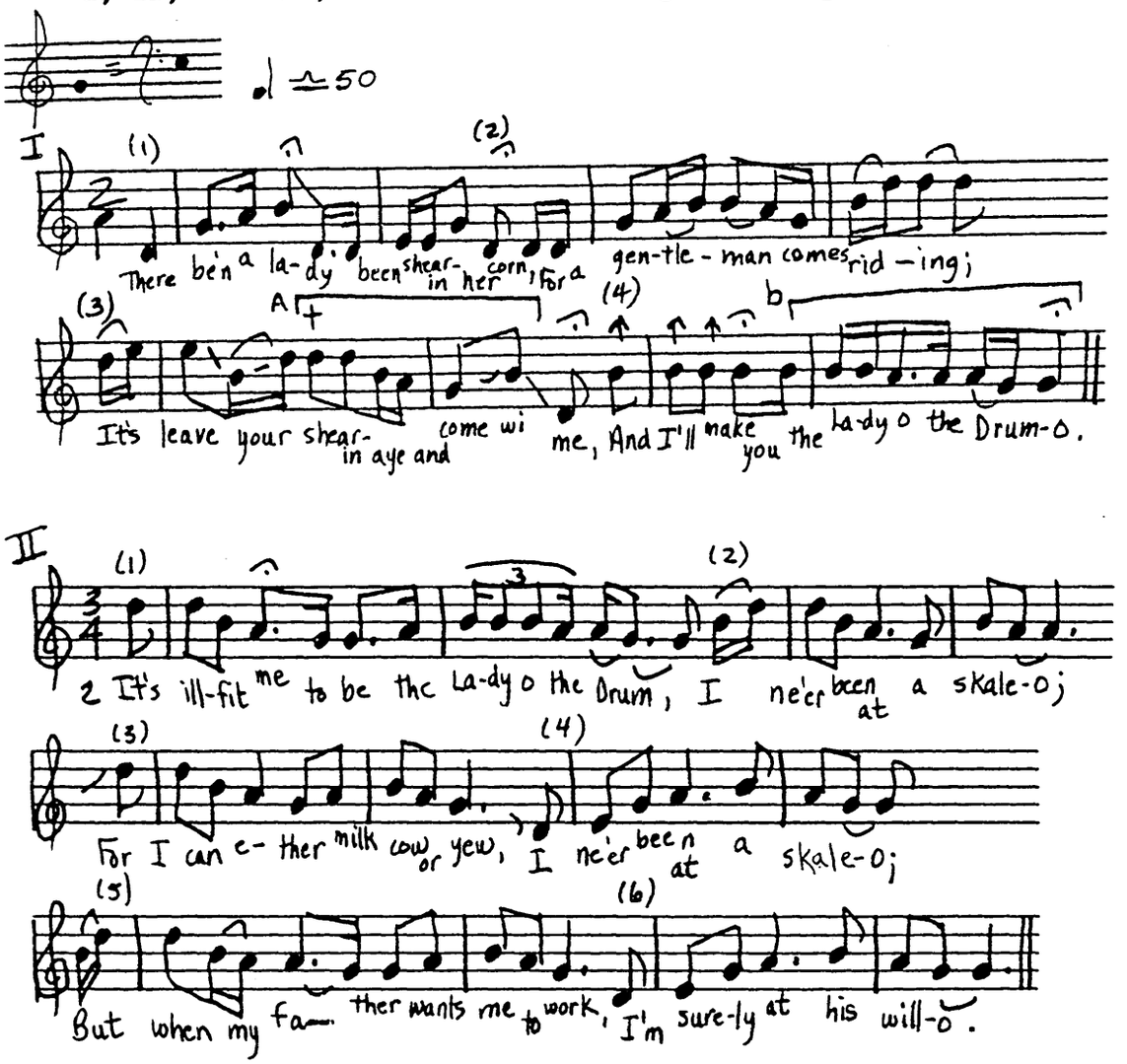
Thus in Martha Johnstone's performance of "Lady o the Drum" (CH 236), the first song in the recording session of 1978, the

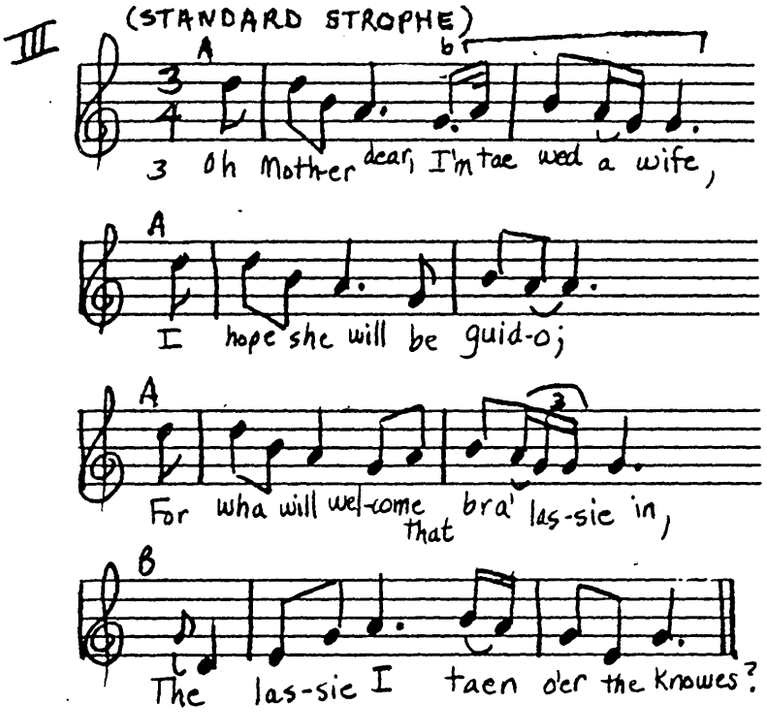
opening strophe was not sung to an unrelated tune; although it certainly was not the standard strophe of "Lady o the Drum" as she eventually established it in III, and as she had sung it twenty-three years before! Three of the four phrases of the opening strophe, see ex. 6, were ones belonging to the tune very commonly associated with "Dowie Dens" (CH 214), a ballad Martha was recorded singing on three different occasions to this common tune, see ex. 6a. "Dowie Dens" had not been sung on either of the two occasions when Martha was recorded singing "Lady o the Drum." But a comparison of the "Dowie Dens" tune with the "Lady o Drum" standard strophe, III, shows a fairly close correspondence between the phrases of each. (1) and (2) of "Dowie Dens" open similarly to (4) of "Lady o the Drum;" and the second motive of (3) in "Dowie Dens" is a diminution of (1), (2) and (3) in "Lady o the Drum." And it will be noted, after Martha had sung (3) of "Dowie Dens," she began to make adjustments in pitches so that a smooth transition to the "Lady o the Drum" strophe was made -- the cadence of (4) in I was the normal cadence of phrases (1), (2) and (3) of the "Lady o the Drum" standard strophe.

The quadriphrasal form of the standard strophe was not set until III. Strophe II was extended by a repeat of (3) and (4), a typical form of strophe expansion not only in travellers' narratives (see section two, chapter four), but also in the ballads studied by Hendren (re. 1936, p. 41). The end of the performance broke with the established pattern as the singer reverted to alternating B and A phrases, an irregularity which also occurred at the end of the 1955 performance, see ex. 6b. Why Martha did not maintain the standard strophe is better understood by first citing other narratives which were regular <u>until</u> the finish -- "Sailor's Return," (Laws N42), recorded

in 1955 and 1975 and evidently a memorized text, featured the same break in the standard strophe at the end. "Queen Jean" (CH 170) was memorized and sung to a rhyming quatrain until the last two strophes, which were evidently improvised, see ex. 6 , chapter four. And we can conclude from these other examples like "Lady o the Drum," that Martha probably did not know the exact verse formulation for the end of the song, and that she improvised them to alternating melodic phrases, based on textual lines she had heard sung in childhood. (See Appendix C for a summary of Martha's oral sources.)

Example 6. Martha Johnstone, "Lady o the Drum," 78/109/A1; strophes I, II, and III; full text with irregular strophe VIII.





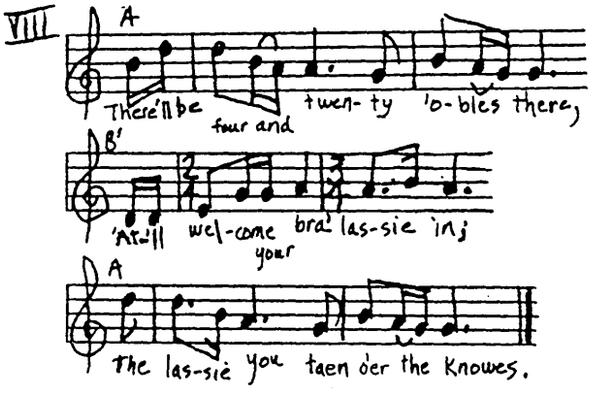
4 For wha's tae welcome your bra lassie in,
That's mair no' I can tell-o;
For Mother dear, I'm tae wed a wife,
I'm tae wed yin o tae spin-o.

5 She'll put on my boot and spur,
And ride my steed at the time of need;
For wha shall welcome that bra lassie in,
The lassie I taen ower the knowes?

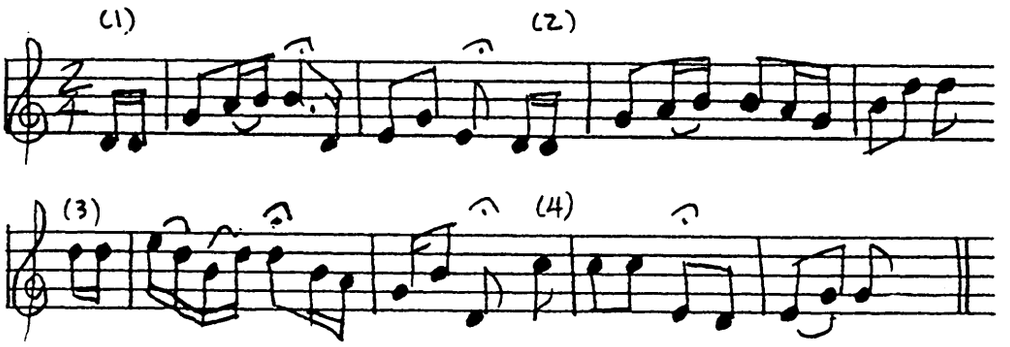
6 For who shall bake my wedding bread
Or who shall brey my ale-o;
For who shall welcome the bra lassie in,
The lassie I taen ower the knowes?

[brey = brew]

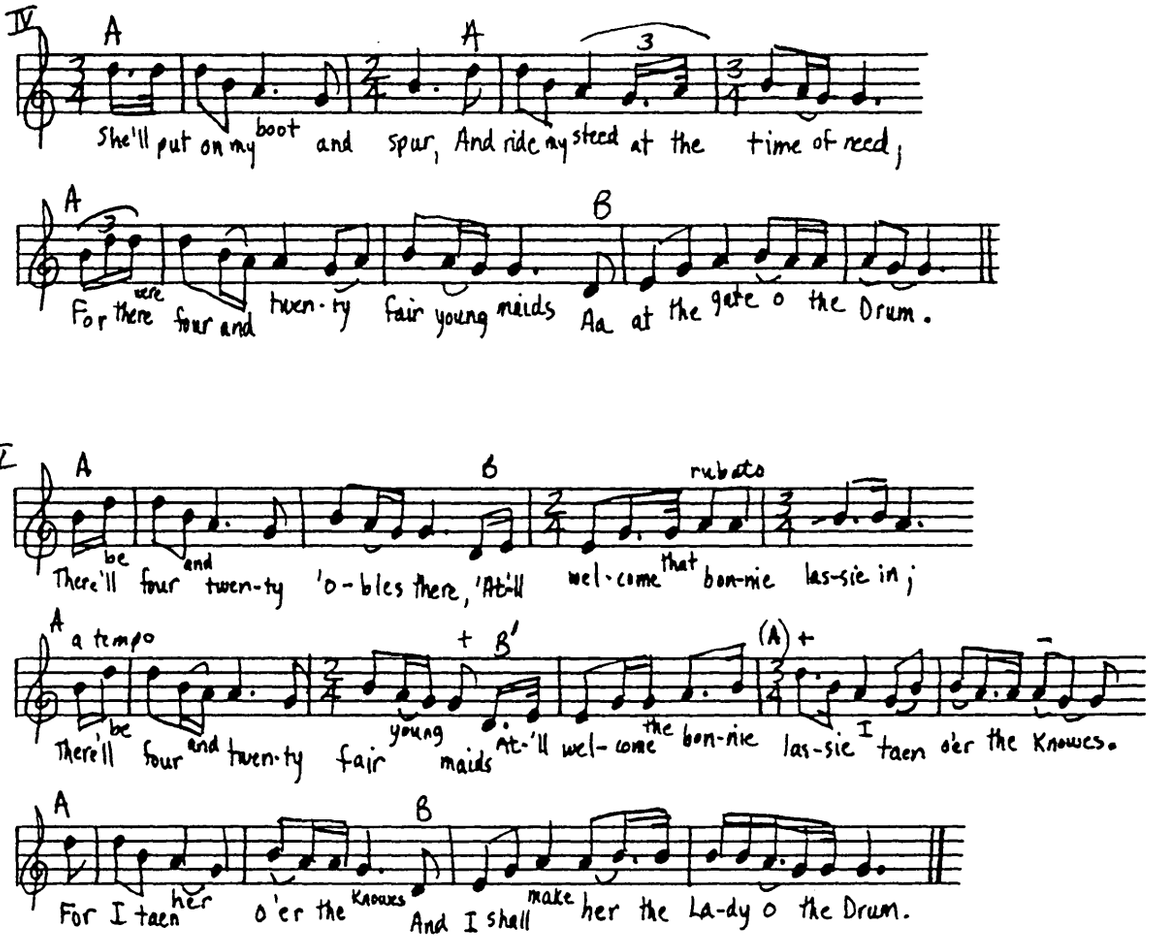
7 For the baker 'll bake your wedding bread,
And the breyer will brey your ale-o;
For there're four and twenty fair young maids
Aa at the gate o the Drum-o.



Example 6a. Martha Johnstone, "Dowie Dens," standard strophe in 55/44 and 75/197/A5.



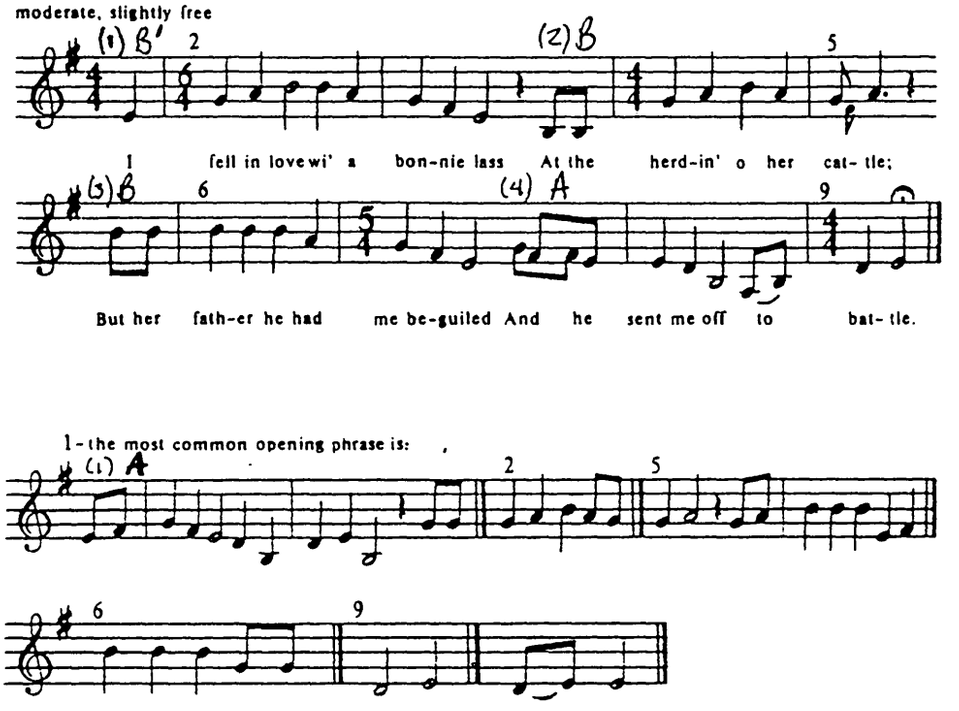
Example 6b. Martha Johnstone, "Lady o the Drum," 55/51; strophes IV and V (penultimate — standard, and final — irregular).



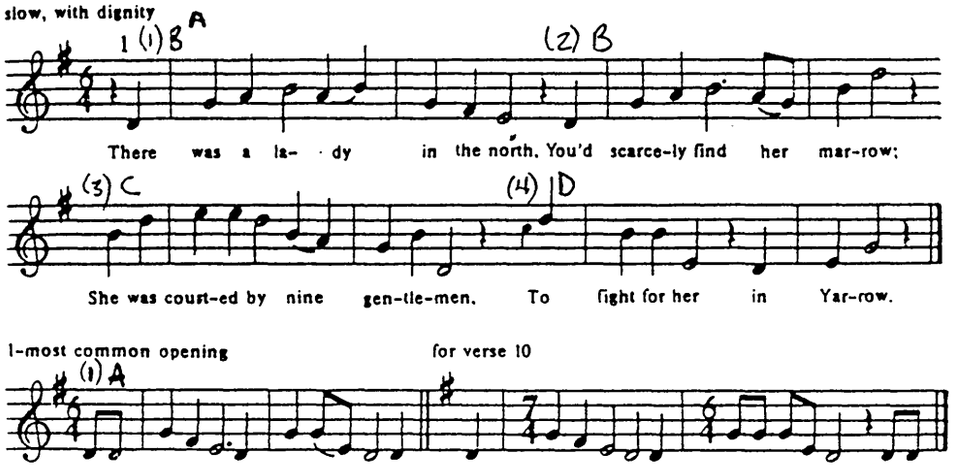
Establishing the Beginning of a Standard Strophe

The very opening of a narrative in song, phrase one, may be confused musically with the second phrase, the phrase carrying the medial cadence. And thus the A of an ABBA tune may not be correctly formed until the fourth phrase is first sung, as in Maggie McPhee's performance of Laws M13, ex. 7. In Jock Higgins' performance of Child 214, (1) of the standard strophe was not established until II — then it was a distinct phrase within an ABCD standard strophe, see ex. 8. At the start of the song, (1) was more similar to (2)B; although this particular opening is common to other travellers' performances of the ballad.

Example 7. Maggie McPhee, "Locks and Bolts," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 257 - 259. Copy of the tune only.



Example 8. Jock Higgins, "The Braes o Yarrow," in MacColl (1977), pp. 100-102. Copy of tune only.

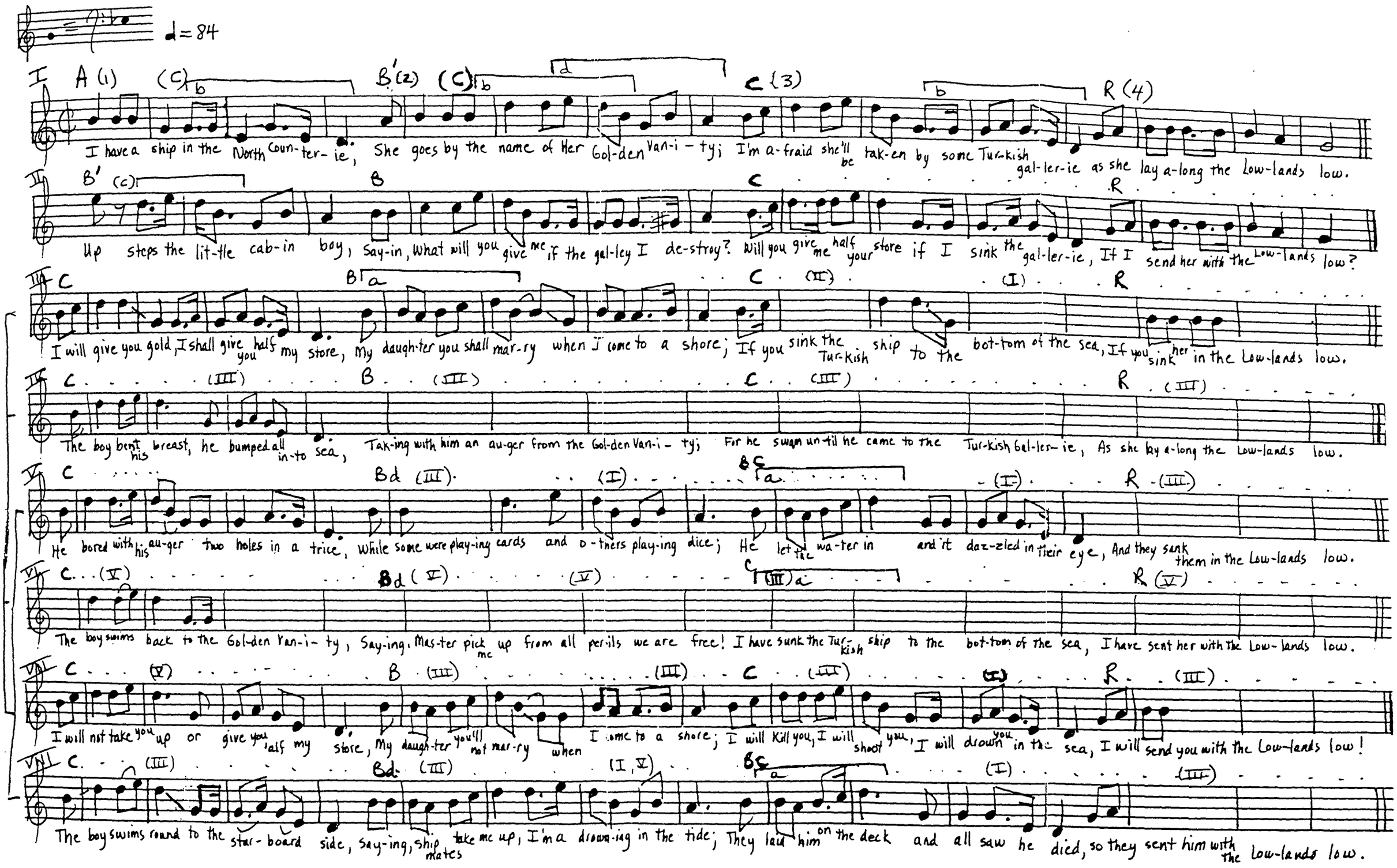


"The Golden Vanity" (CH 286). One of Martha Johnstone's fine ballads, "The Golden Vanity," was sung consistently with varied strophes I and II at the start of the three recorded performances — in 1957, 1975 and 1978. A stable form of the tune was finally established by III (IV in 1978), but the consistent variability of I and II in every performance raises questions about the singer's intentionality. (Might the singer have purposely started the ballad without the standard strophe, the regular form of the tune? This question will be discussed in chapter five, II.2.1.) The text of "Golden Vanity" was obviously memorized for it did not vary over the twenty-one year span of recordings, and the ballad was one Martha had been trying to teach her grandchildren (75/197/B1). It is most curious why the standard strophe of this fixed text ballad should not have likewise become fixed and thus have been presented from the very start of performances. Several of Martha's narratives with fixed texts were begun with standard strophes e.g., "Lord Randal" (CH 12), "Dowie Dens,"

"Queen Jean," "Huntingtower" (CH 232, Appendix) and "Bonnie Hoose o Airlie" (CH 199). By comparison with these narratives, "Golden Vanity's" irregular beginning can be explained as the result of a faint tune "idea" which did not become clear until III, see ex. 9. It is conjectural how often Martha performed the ballad, and it may be that she sang this one less often than the other memorized ballads which she had consistently (in different recording sessions) begun with the regular forms of their tunes.

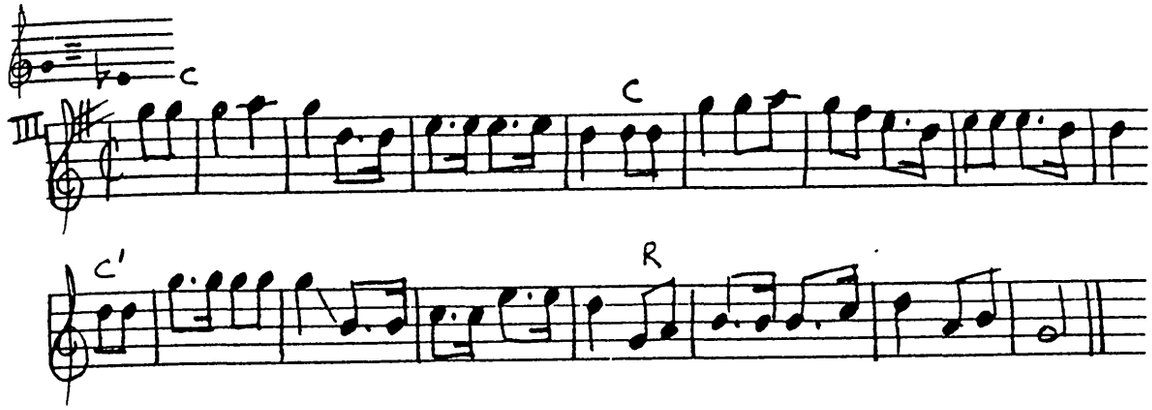
A closer look at the complete performance of "Vanity" in 1975, and comparing it to the two other variants, reveals another factor to be considered in the explanation of the ballad's irregular start. The first variant of the ballad, recorded in 1957, was quite different musically from the two later performances. The form of the standard strophe was CCC'R, contrasting with the CBCR form of the two later variants. The tessitura of the first was markedly higher, at the upper octave from the first and final pitches of the refrain — Martha was, of course, only in her mid-50s then. The later variants both had tessituras at the third above tonics, e♭, f. Martha's advanced aged in 1975 and 1978 might have been the reason for those performances' irregularity at the beginning, but it is noteworthy that even in 1957 the standard strophe was not established until III. Was there a <u>positive</u> reason why she shouldn't have sung the regular strophe from the start — or was it merely lack of ability to conceive <u>the tune</u> from the start?

Example 9. Martha Johnstone, "Golden Vanity," 75/197/B1. Complete song followed by standard strophes of 57/8 and 78/109/B3. CS

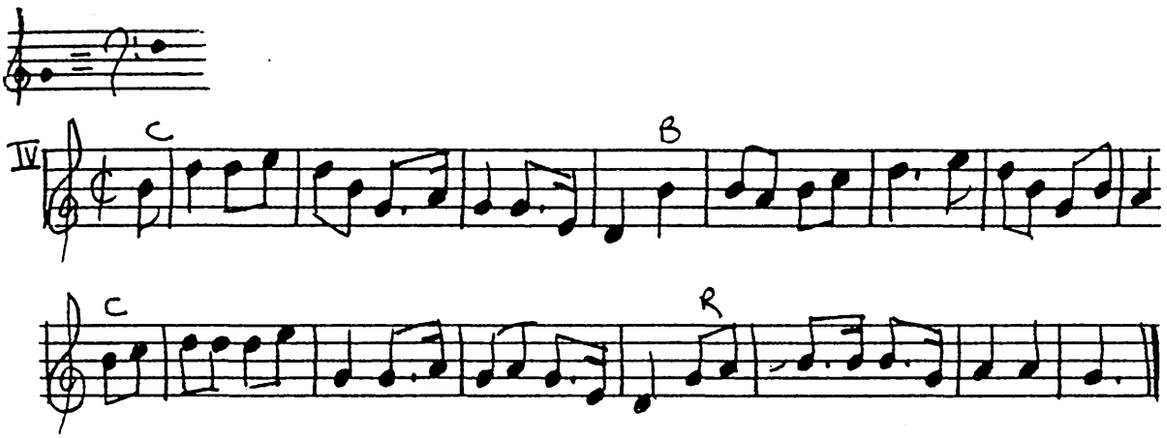


(3)

The 1957 Standard Strophe, "Golden Vanity"



The 1978 Standard strophe, "Golden Vanity"



An examination of the interior of the 1975 variant may provide a possible clue to the question of regularity, why (1) and (2) did not stabilize until III. Phrases (3) and (4) of the standard strophe were clearly formed and stable from strophe I, until V. At V, (3) was varied by

beginning with the first motive of (2)B, first clearly formed in III. This phrase variant, BC, was repeated again in VIII. The close correspondence of phrases (2) and (3), B and C, in strophes V and VIII was very like I, where phrases (2) and (3) were confused — before the proper form of B(2) was clarified in II. But was the BC phrase variant of V and VIII a confusion or a purposeful musical equivalent? That it was not a confusion is shown by Martha's control of it in VI and VII — BC was not used in these strophes; Martha reverted to the standard (3)C of strophes III and IV. Why didn't she continue with the variant in VI and why did she resume it in VIII?

One answer would be that the singer was interpreting the boy's and the captain's lines in VI and VII, choosing the motive with the highest pitch (the 6th) and tessitura of the song when the words were in first person. For the motive requiring less effort to sing, BCa, when (3) began with the more gradual ascent to the dominant, occurred twice only -- and only when the third phrase was in narrative i.e., in 2nd or 3rd person.

The phrases of "Golden Vanity" were melodic entities, but they were not fixed in the singer's mind. Their component motives and figures were organic units — fluid and moreover capable of combination in different sequences. In this respect, the ballad compares with at least two of Martha's other melodically variable narratives, Child 2 and Child 106, discussed in chapter five. Both of those narratives opened consistently with irregular strophes — in five and six different performances recorded over a twenty-three year period. They can be understood as musical improvisations on fixed texts, and "Golden Vanity" shares some of their improvisatory features,

including a lack of regularity at the beginning of its story.

IV. Structural Variants within the Standard Strophe

Establishing a tune was very rarely problematic for an accomplished performer, such as Johnnie Whyte. He had sung regularly for an appreciative audience of relatives all his life, and took pride in being able to sing — "They're all high songs and long songs wi me, none of them one or two verses!" (JW, 75/125/A2) What could be observed in performances of some strophic ballads by Johnnie Whyte of Montrose was the incorporation of phrasal or motivic variants within standard strophes, or the alternation of figural variants within a standard strophe. Most interesting is the fact that with very few exceptions, the variants — phrasal, motivic and figural — occurred in the third phrases of standard strophes. Why this third phrase should be subject to greater variation is a moot point.

Bronson has argued that the modal and tonal composition of tunes, and phrases within tunes, are responsible for change (the singers' inclinations to alter or vary melodies) or its opposite, stability (and the controlling force of tradition). ("The Morphology of Ballad Tunes," 1954[7]) And he has concluded after an analysis of 3450 tunes taken from British-American records of ballad tunes dating back to the 1600s that, "Least stable is likely to be the third phrase of the tune — which is another way of saying that the popular memory is weaker in the third phrase than anywhere else." (TTCB I, 1959, p. xxvii)

As a counterexample to Bronson's conclusion about the memorial weakness of the singer's third phrase, I would present the performances of Johnnie Whyte. It cannot be presumed he did not know his tunes completely or adequately, or had any difficulty remembering them. Johnnie was a confident performer and never failed to finish a performance, though occasionally he erred, with words and missed a verse — and sometimes complained of the song being "too high." But this last characteristic showed his awareness of pitch and his self-critical attitude towards performing. He always made apologies for not being able to sing as well as he would have liked to , and his models were his mother's and father's singing.

J — Ma father was born in Perthshire, brought up in Aberdeenshire.

L — Did he sing like you do?

J — He was a better singer 'n me! I wish I couldha sung like ma faither.

....

J — Oh, it [The Twa Sisters] was an old song. My mother sung it and I suppose prob'ly her mother maybe sung before her when she was quite young woman. That's when I learned it off her. That's hoo I have all that old songs is off my mother and my father.

L — Do you sing it like your mother did?

J — Yes, same say, same way. Yes — but no mebbe, not so good . . . she was a braw singer. So was my father.

(JW, 75/106/B1 and 78/107/A2)

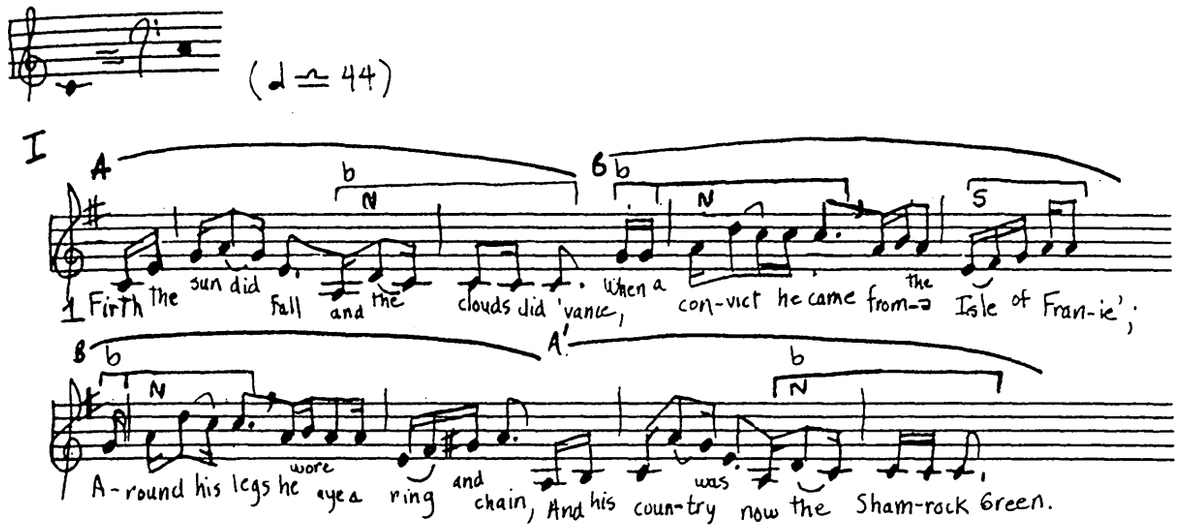
To support the thesis that variation is a process of cognition and volition, and that variants are purposeful structural alternatives, not the results of memory failure or uncertainty; the following analyses of two ballads in Johnnie Whyte's repertoire are presented. Each ballad features musical equivalents known by the singer and his deliberate use of them is evidence of fine musical control.

IV.1 Figural Variant in the Third Phrase

Johnnie Whyte's "The Convict's Song" (MC 95) was a fixed text narrative sung to a standard strophe in the ABBA form for three performances (once in 1975 for me, and twice in 1976 — the first for Duncan Williamson and the second specifically for recording purposes.) The tune Johnnie sang, for all three performances, featured the same standard strophe with the same figural variant but not used consistently in the same strophes. (Although the variant only involved one pitch change, the characteristic amphibrach was altered along with the interval; so the variant is at the structural level of the figure, not merely pitch.) The tune was highly repetitious at the level of the figure and with identical motives in both A and B phrases, these motives differing only in register, see ex. 10. (Motive b's recurrence in all four phrases of the standard strophe in I is marked in the example.) The redundancy of the figures and motives in the tune corresponds to the verbal pleonasm — the textual redundancies — of every verse, "so common in oral style," noted Lord. (1960, p. 34)

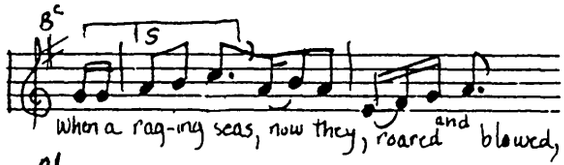
Each recorded performance featured a figure variant in the third phrase of II, a musical alternative which matched the stepwise ascending cadential figure immediately preceding it at the medial cadence. This figural variant is marked "S" in II of the example. Why this particular figure occurred at this point in every performance of the song by Johnnie is easier to answer than why it did not occur consistently in the other strophes i.e., from performance to performance.

Example 10. Johnnie Whyte, "The Convict's Song," 76/214/B2; verbal rhythms approximated, beams indicating metric divisions, half bars indicating poetic stress. Variations of internal phrases shown after I, with figure variants identified.



II A There were six long years went slowly by,

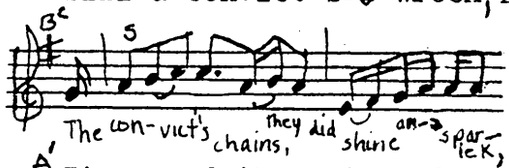
B We was coming home forie to make up oneie;



A' What caused me to be on these foreign shories.

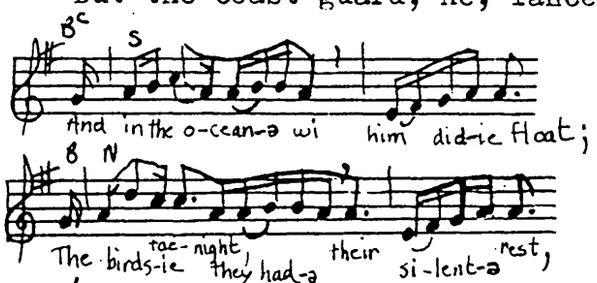
III A But the coast guaried, he, stood all on the beach,

B Till a convict's-a wreck, now it was in reach



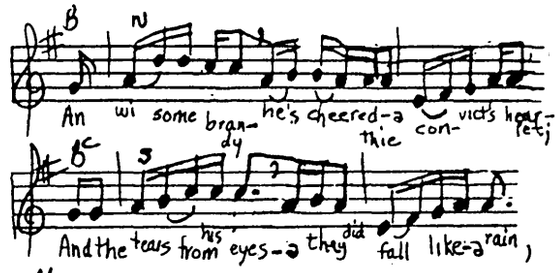
A' It opened the veins of the coast guaried's heariet.

IV A But the coast guard, he, lanced aye a little boat,



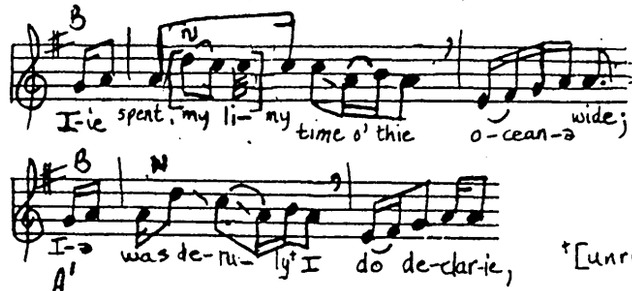
A' But the convict, he, had aye a wounded breast.

V A But the coast guard, he, played his noble pariet,



A' I think young mannie, you're aye a Shamrock Green.

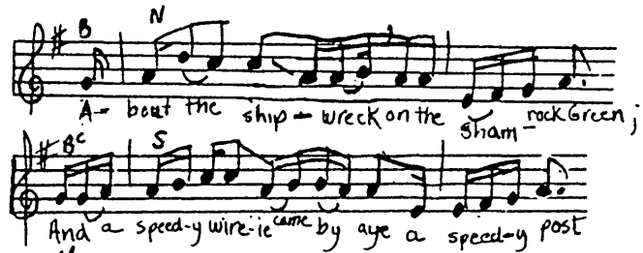
VI A For I am aye a Shamrock, the convict cried,



†[unruly]

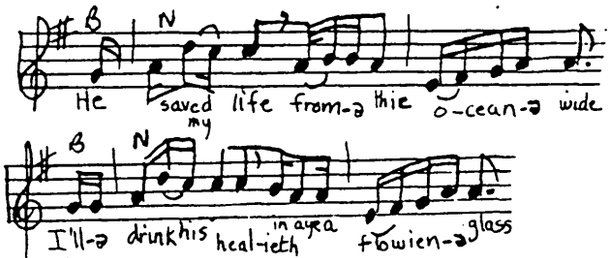
A' I got traniesporieted forie seven long years.

VII A But a speedie letter went-ə to the queen,



A' For to free the convict they thought was lost.

VIII A Oh God bless thes coast guard, he's saved my life,



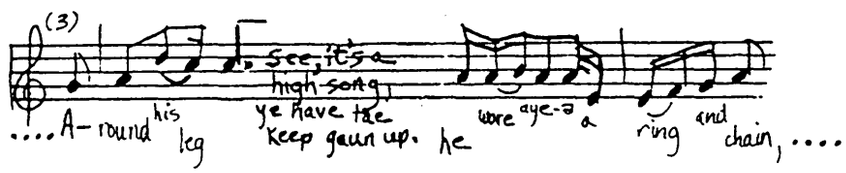
A And I'll bid farewell to the Isle o France.

Knudsen wrote about the melodic changes from verse to verse and from performance to performance:

> The singer can vary the melody from verse to verse following the content and form of the text. And the singer can consciously or unconsciously vary the melody each time the ballad is sung in a new situation after shorter or longer lapses of time.
>
> Evald Tang Kristensen was aware of the significance of these changes and knew that changeability was a quality of the folksong and not an indication of uncertainty on the part of the singer.
>
> (1976 , p. 48)

On the basis of the consistent use of S in II, in all performances, the figure probably had an expressive function. The singer preferred it, a contrasting figure, to the entire repetition of the b motive — sung once in every one of the preceding six phrases. The use of a "new" figure would highlight the sense of the line at that point, the line carrying the peak of the storm, "a raging seas ...."

The 1975 performance. In 1975, Johnnie sang the balance of the song without S, until the end when it was used again in VII(3). The decision at the end of the song in 1975 to use the stepwise alternative was prompted, no doubt, by physical strain — for the pitch of the song had risen a whole step from the original pitch, $E^{\flat}$ (at the start). The original figure of the b motive, labled N in the example, entailed a leap of a fourth to the highest pitch of the tune, the ninth, f. This figure N was the cause of Johnnie's loss of pitch control, for in 1975 he said immediately after he'd sung the figure in phrase (3) of I,



(75/106/A5)

By the end of the song the singer was tired of straining so he sang the easier S, devoid of the leap and the ninth.

The 1976 performance, first take. A pitch rise, from the original tonic of $E^{\flat}$, was also evident in 1976. But S was repeated more often, in III and V, and opting for the alternative figure in (3) of these two strophes helped Johnnie maintain better pitch control than he did in 1975. The S figure rose stepwise to the high tonic. The singer's more frequent use of S in 1976 may well have been conditioned by the more relaxed performing circumstances. There were no strangers present and Johnnie was singing specifically for a traveller friend rather than for me.

The second take in 1976. This performance, ex. 10, was pitched at the start a minor third lower than the other two, in C; this pitch was maintained throughout. The song was also performed at a slower tempo than the other two and it is evidence of the singer's very relaxed approach to the song on this repeat performance. Unlike the 1975 performance, when the first strophe with N was repeated exactly for every verse but two, this performance only featured the ^{N} variant again for VIII. All other strophes featured the "easier" S in either (2) or (3). (VI is omitted from the analysis because of a mistake in (2)) But the standard strophe in this performance could be described as more variable than the tune in the other two performances.

Clearly, variability in "The Convict's Song", as it was performed by Johnnie, was not a result of memorial weakness or uncertain formulation of a phrase. Variability is dependent upon the sense of the text or the particular circumstances of performing — who is listen-

ing, for what reasons the singer is singing — and the singer's physical state in relation to the pitch he begins from. And these factors, the song text, the audience and the state of the singer, can affect the song's regularity or variability in performance. A singer may respond emotionally or excitedly to the subject of the text e.g., a storm, and change a musical figure. Or a more relaxed attitude towards performing may influence his choice of musical alternatives.

IV.2 Third Phrase Variants in Child 214

Three performances of "Dowie Dens" were recorded from Johnnie, two were during Hogmanay, 1974 and 1976. The other (1975) was sung during a Sunday afternoon ceilidh with family relatives from Aberdeen. The 1975 performance differed from the other two in its more fluid standard strophe. (3) took two forms: one was descent by a leap and undulations from the upper to the lower fifth (st. I and VII - XI in ex. 11, labeled "M"); the other was an undulating arch beginning on the third (after an anacrusis on the lower fifth) rising to the fifth and descending to the tonic, strophes II - VI of the example, labeled "S." These two phrases are not part of two different tunes, but are again musical equivalents. This is shown by Johnnie's other two performances: the 1974 song was sung with a fixed standard strophe incorporating M as (3) throughout; the 1976 song featured S throughout. What are the possible reasons for Johnnie's choosing one or the other, or using them both in one performance of the ballad?

Example 11. Johnnie Whyte, "Dowie Dens of Yarrow," 75/125/A2. Word rhythms transcribed with simplified derivation values i.e., ♪, ♩ and 𝅗𝅥 only. Semi-bar lines precede metrically stressed syllables. Quavers and semi-quavers are joined up with beams to further clarify metre and text relationships.

CS

(♩ ≃ 60)

I (1) A (2) P (3) M (4) Z

[There] were a las-sie lived in the East, you could scarcely find her marrie; She was lov-ed by nine gen-tle-men-ie, aye a plou-man lad fae Yar-row.

II P S (I)

Nine gen- men- tle-e ie sat a-drink-een wine, sat a-drink-in wine on Yar-row; And there eet fel-lie oot a-mang sel-lies, their-ie they fight wad for her-ie to-o-mor-row.

III S' S (II)

Oh shall you take aye a gun, aye a gun, Or will you take-ie this bow and ar-row? Or shall you take-a noo the gey broad-ie swor-ied, will you fight for her-ie to-o-mor-row?

IV (III) S' S (II)

A'll-a neith-er-ie take your gun, your gun-ie, Or I'll not take your bow and ar-row; But I shall take-a noo the gey broad swor-ied, And I'll fight for her-ie to-o-mor-row.

V (II) P S (II)

For three he drew, then three he slew, Three he dead-ly woun-ded; Tither bro-ther-ie John-nie, he came-a trip-pin-a down. And he pier-ieced him-a through the mid-dle.

VI (II) P S (V)

Go home, go home, you false young man, And tell your sis-ter-ie Sar-o; Her true love-a John-nie, he's dead an-a gon-ie, He's a bleed-ien cor-iepse on Yar-row!

VII (III) (III) P (VI) M (VI)

O-ho Moth-er-ie dear, I have dreamt aye a dream, but I hope it's-a not-ie-a for-ie sor-row; That I was pull-ien some-a heath-er-ie bel-lies on the dow-ie den-ies o Yar-row.

VIII (III) P (VII) M (VII)

O-ho Daugh-ter-ie dear I shall read your-ie dream, But I'll read iet all-ie-a for-ie sor-row; Your true love John-nie, he's dead and-ie gon-ie, He's a bleed-ien cor-iepse on Yar-row.

IX (III) P (VII) M (VII)

O-ho Mother-ie dee' will you make my bed, Will you make it long-a but-a nar-row? a-My true love died for me John-nie last-a night, I shall die for him-ie to-mor-row.

X (VIII) P M (II)

Her-ie hair iet-a been three quar-ter-ies long-ie, In the col-our of it-a was yel-low, She tied it round her-ie mid-die small, And she carried hees cor-iepse out of Yar-row.

XI (V) S' S (II)

Oh Mother-ie dear, you've got seven son-ies, You could wed them all-ie-a to-mor-row, But you'll no wed-a me tae nae high-er-ie-a-gree than my own true love fae Yar-row.

Before answering that question, let us look at the other phrases in the tune. (1) and (4) were stable and involved no structural alterations. But (2) was slightly more fluid. Before the medial cadence in some strophes an alternative motive, labeled "S'" in the example, outlining an inverted arch and ascending stepwise to the subdominant cadence, was used. S' did not occur often, only twice in 1974 and 1976, in IV and VII, and in V and IX respectively. In 1975 it occurred in III, IV and XI, see ex. 11. It is similar to the first motive of phrase (3)S. When S' was used in conjunction with (3)S, the strophe had the form AS'SZ. The phrase variant (3)M was not used in conjunction with S'. M was only used in conjunction with the more regular motive ending (2), "P." P is a repeating, anticipatory tone pattern leading to the medial cadence. What can these variant combinations tell us?

It may be helpful to consider Thorkild Knudsen's ideas based on his experience working with ballad melodies collected in Denmark. He was faced with variable melodies which he did not consider a unique feature exclusive to balladry; he considered ballads, work songs and laments to be connected (1976, p. 73). Time and time again he wrote that the music of ballads was varied according to the textual meaning and the performance circumstances,

> Every word-connection and every note-connection, rhythmic and melodic, is formed on the spot by the singer according to the meaning of the words and the nature of the performing situation. Phrasing can be characterized by speech, by shouting and by singing.
>
> (1976, p. 49)

Of course Knudsen's examples of the different types of phrasing, speech, shouting and singing were very distinct and they cannot be applied per se to Johnnie's performances because Johnnie's narrative

songs were neither improvisatory nor formulaic as were the "intoned" ballads of Knudsen's study. However, in an abstract sense, Knudsen's distinctions might be helpful in understanding Johnnie's phrasal and motivic variants.

In the first instance, "Dowie Dens" belongs to the genre of sung lamentation, for its subject is the separation of two lovers by tragedy and death, and the sorrowful grievances of Saro comprise the final half of the song. The importance of death in traveller society was detailed in chapter one, and Coffin's speculation on the origin of ballads as narrative obituary verse is apt:

> .... my thoughts .... have hardened along these lines: narrative verses were commonly recited and sung at funerals in Western Europe during the Middle Ages; some of these narratives were significant enough or memorable enough to be sung long after the occasion for which they were composed had been forgotten; from them, gradually, a secular song form which we now call the ballad was developed.
>
> (1983, p. 30)

(3)M in Johnnie's performances of "Dowie Dens" could be regarded as a cry of mourning. It was used to open the performance in 1975, in I, and then suspended until the "lassie" first enters the story and speaks about sorrow. M is used for the balance of the dialogue about her dead lover, and also through the scene when she carries the corpse from Yarrow. The final strophe is not about death and the variant M is supplanted by (3)S, which had been used in II - VI. S could be defined as the "singing phrase." In 1976 Johnnie used this variant exclusively for (3), and it may be purely coincidental, but Johnnie commented immediately after the performance, "That's the way I sing it." Then his brother Bryce said, "That's the way ma mother sang it 'n aa." (76/1/A4) I do not imply that Johnnie was referring to the variant S when he made his comment, but that S <u>characterized</u> the performance

that was specifically described by the singer and his brother as the traditional way of singing "Dowie Dens," "That's the real old way." (BW, Idem.)

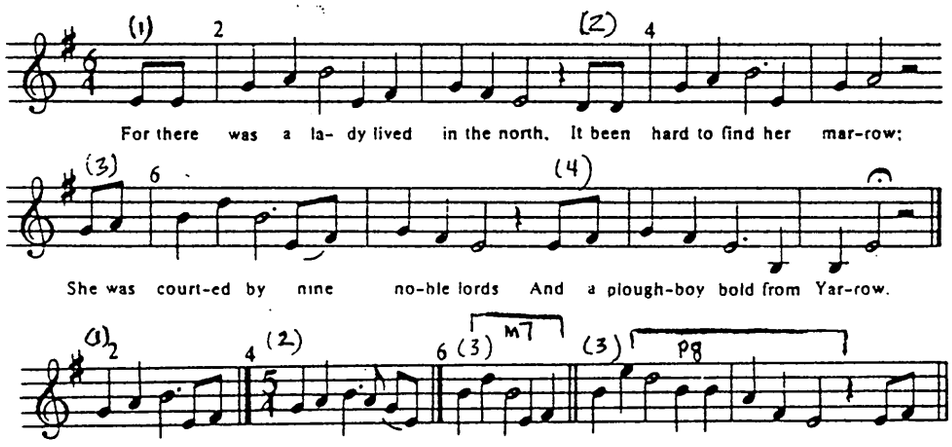
In 1975, S' only occurred in conjunction with (3)S; in the other performances it only arose twice. It was consistently used, nonetheless, in the challenge scene and in the dream sequence of the ballad story. In 1975 it occurred three times, in III, IV and XI -- the only verses when Saro's lover was involved in dialogue (III, IV) and when Saro made her bold and singular pronouncement she would wed no other. This pledge was equivalent to her true love's verbal pledge to defend his love for her in III, IV. Whether or not S' was deliberately chosen for this express meaning can't be proven now by asking Johnnie, but the textual and musical connection is there in the performance.

The mourning phrase, (3)M only occurred after P, the alternative to S' in 1975. P might be described as the "speech phrase," not in any literal sense, but because it only entailed three pitches a M2 apart, and its melodic movement was essentially stationary as the pitches "turned around" the medial cadence pitch. This particular combination, a "speech" phrase before the mourning phrase may have been the combination Johnnie preferred for this particular audience of family relatives, for it was used in five of the eleven strophes in 1975. During the other performances, for more distant relatives on Hogmanay in 1974 and in 1976, the combination P (3)M was used rarely and not at all in 1976. The correspondence between variability and social circumstances will be discussed further in chapter five. It may have been significant that "Dowie Dens" was more variable in strophic form in 1975 for

an intimate audience, and more regular or constant on the other, less intimate, occasions.

As supportive evidence to the use of a special variant for the stanzas on Saro's mourning her true love, I can cite one final example in this chapter. John MacDonald also used a descending, falling cry of mourning, a phrasal variant similar to Johnnie's during his performance of "Dowie Dens" for Ewan MacColl. His variant was used as (3), like Johnnie's, in a tune very similar to Johnnie's. See ex. 12. And the variant assumed its greatest range, falling the interval of a M9 in the stanzas after the 'plouman' was slain; it crystallized for those stanzas when Saro wept, carried John out of Yarrow and made her death promise.

Example 12. John MacDonald, "The Ploughboy Bold from Yarrow," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 96 - 98.

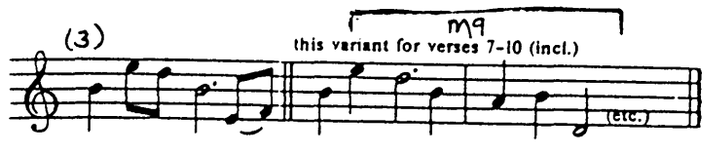


1 For there was a lady lived in the north,
It been hard to find her marrow;
She was courted by nine noble lords,
And a ploughboy bold from Yarrow.

2 For as John gaed o'er yon high, high hill,
Ay, and down yon path so narrow,
It was there he met nine noble lords
They were comin' up through Yarrow.

3 For it's have you came my wine to drink,
Or have you came through sorrow?
Or it's have you came my broadsword to try
On the dowie dens of Yarrow?

4 For it's we've not came your wine to drink,
Nor have we came through sorrow;
But it's we have came your broadsword to try
On the dowie dens of Yarrow.



5 For there's nine of youse, but one of I –
Sure, it is no equal marrow;
But it's I will fight youse one by one
On the dowie dens of Yarrow.

6 For it's three he drew and three he slew,
Ay, and three lay mortally wounded;
When her false brother, John, came in between
And he drew his sword and slew him.

7 For as he gaed up yon narrow path
He met his sister, Saro,
Sayin', 'Brother dear, I've dreamt a dream
And I dreamt it all through sorrow,
That my true love, John, lies dead and gone
On the dowie dens of Yarrow.'

8 O, it's sister dear, dry up your tears,
Ay, and weep no more through sorrow;
For your true love, John, is dead and gone,
And his blood runs down the Yarrow.

9 For she had long hair, three-quarters long,
And the colour of it was yellow;
And she tied it roond his middle small
And she pulled him out of Yarrow.

10 Sayin', 'Father dear, dig me a grave,
And dig it broad and deep;
For the one that died for me last night
Sure, I'll die for him tomorrow.'

11 O, daughter dear, dry up your tears,
Ay, and weep no more through sorrow;
Sure, I'll have you wed to a higher degree
Than the ploughboy bold from Yarrow.

12 O, father dear, you've seven sons,
All ploughing down in Yarrow,
You may wed them all to your higher degree,
But you'll bury me tomorrow.

Chapter Four

THE IRREGULAR STROPHE IN STORY SINGING

Although J.W. Hendren did not have sound recordings of ballad performances for study, his close examination of stanzaic and musical structures (1936) warrants attention. Folk songs from twenty-seven published collections formed the subject matter for his Study of Ballad Rhythm, with Special Reference to Ballad Music (re. "Bibliography," pp. 176 - 7). Hendren was particularly interested in the irregularities of strophes transcribed by Sharp and Barry for their collections, Folk Songs from Dorset (London, 1908), One Hundred English Folk-Songs (London, 1916), and British Ballads from Maine (1929). Hendren concluded that frequently the structure of stanzas within any one narrative song is varied:

> Some stanzas may appear to indicate one pattern and some another. It seems to be felt necessary to attach some single and final label to the ballad which will apply to it throughout, and the zealous effort to discover such a label seems to postulate a consistent uniformity, perhaps hard to recognize, in all of the stanzas of the text. But frequently such a notion fails to square with the facts. It must not be overlooked that stanza pattern in ballads, like everything else connected with them, is riddled with irregularities and exceptions. Often a text appears to have several different stanza patterns for the reason that it actually does have them.
>
> (1936, p. 94)

To cover the irregularities of versification, observed Hendren,

> .... the tune is prolonged, shortened, or otherwise correspondingly adjusted by means of repetition, transposition or other manipulation of its phrases. New musical ideas are not employed .... the custom is to expand or rearrange the material at hand.
>
> (Ibid., p. 46)

Analysis of the sound recordings of ballad performances yields the same evidence: narrative songs often have strophes of varying length or form, but they exhibit "a conservatism of musical ideas." (Hendren, Idem.) Irregular strophes are one of two types, either reductions of a standard strophe, or expansions of a standard strophe. Seldom do irregular strophes contain new phrases or new melodic material, i.e., nonrecurring in the performance or in other recorded variants of the song.

I. The Reduced Strophe and its Function

The quadriphrasal strophe has been so very commonly observed by collectors and musicologists of ballads that it has been "reckoned the normal type" of ballad melody. (Hendren, pp. 7-8) Nigel Wilkins, author of the "ballad" article in The New Grove, commented on the universality of the "four pulse beat of the normal musical phrase" in Western music and related this "fundamental fact" to English and Scottish balladry:

> In the British popular tradition it is uncommon for there to be fewer than four phrases of four pulses each [in the ballad tune] .... often there may be more than four [phrases].
>
> (1980, II, p. 73)

Contrary to the norm of British melody, the narrative performances of travellers, in England as well as Scotland, feature strophes of fewer than four phrases — not uncommonly. MacColl has correctly noted that among his Scots and English traveller informants, "Telescoping a melody from a four-line to a two-line form .... would seem to exist as a practice among both

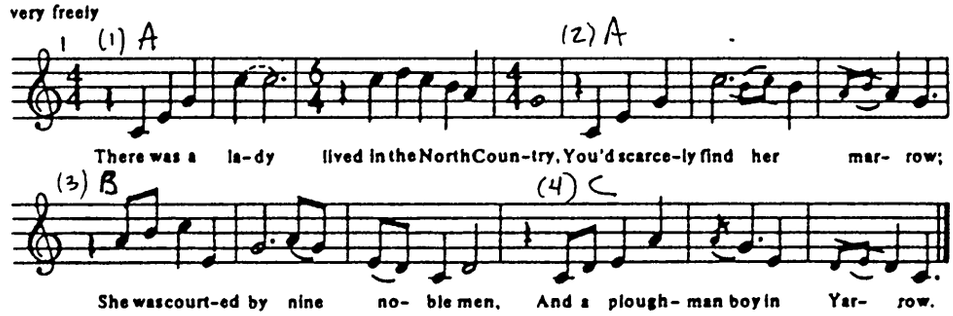
.... groups." (1977, p. 24) His analysis of one-hundred-thirty-one songs showed the practice occurs most frequently with tunes in the ABBA form, when "the first two lines of a quatrain have disappeared so that the song goes automatically into couplets." (Idem.)

In MacColl's published collection, as in every song book based on actual performances, these irregular couplets are shown as verses with lines of omission. But the irregular couplets in a narrative song must not be presumed incomplete verses; the singer should be given the benefit of the doubt, for his version may be the authentic one for him. (re. my argument, section two, chapter three) Thus, the alternative interpretation of couplets within a quatrain song is that these are short verses and unified. Musically the couplets are without exception set to biphrasal units, either the first half of the standard strophe or the second half.

I.1. The Independent Half-Strophe

Many of MacColl's narrative songs, more than one in five of his twenty-four ballads, included half-strophes. Typically, a detached half-strophe occurs after the opening scene of a ballad drama is set; as in Maria Robertson's "Dowie Dens" when the fight is properly started with the ploughboy's challenge in the single couplet, vs. 7, "It's will you come by one, by one, / Or will you come by three?" The couplet was sung to the biphrasal unit "AA," the first half of the standard strophe, AABC, used to render the other fourteen quatrains. See ex. 1.

Example 1. Maria Robertson, "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 96 - 98.



1 There was a lady lived in the North Country,
You'd scarcely find her marrow;
She was courted by nine noblemen,
And a ploughman boy in Yarrow.

2 O, will you tak' your gun, your gun,
Or will you tak' your arrow?
Or will you tak' your gey broadsword
To fight your cause in Yarrow?

3 I'll neither tak' my gun, my gun,
Nor I'll neither tak' my arrow;
But I will tak' my gey broadsword
To fight my cause in Yarrow.

4 For he rode up yon high, high hill,
And to the dens of Yarrow,
And there he saw nine noblemen
They were drinking wine in Yarrow.

5 O, did you come to drink our wine?
Or did you come for sorrow?
Or did you come your blood to spill
In the dowie dens of Yarrow?

6 I didn't come to drink your wine,
I didn't come for sorrow;
But I come here to fight my cause
In the dowie dens of Yarrow.

7 It's will you come by one, by one,
Or will you come by three?
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

8 It's three he slew and three they drew,
And three lay dead in Yarrow,
When her false brother, John, slipped behind the three,
And pierced him with an arrow.

9 Go home, go home, you false young man,
And tell your sister sorrow;
Her true love, John, lies dead and gone,
In the dowie dens of Yarrow.

10 O father dear, I dreamt a dream,
I hope it won't prove sorrow;
I dreamt I was picking heather bells
In the dowie dens of Yarrow.

11 O, daughter dear, I will read your dream,
I hope it won't prove sorrow;
Ay, your true love, John, lies dead and gone,
On the dowie dens of Yarrow.

12 She wrung her hands and she tore her hair,
And the colour o' it being yellow,
She tied it roond his middle sma',
And carried him oot of Yarrow.

13 O, mother dear, come make my bed,
Come make it long and narrow;
My true love, John, died for me today,
And I'll die for him tomorrow.

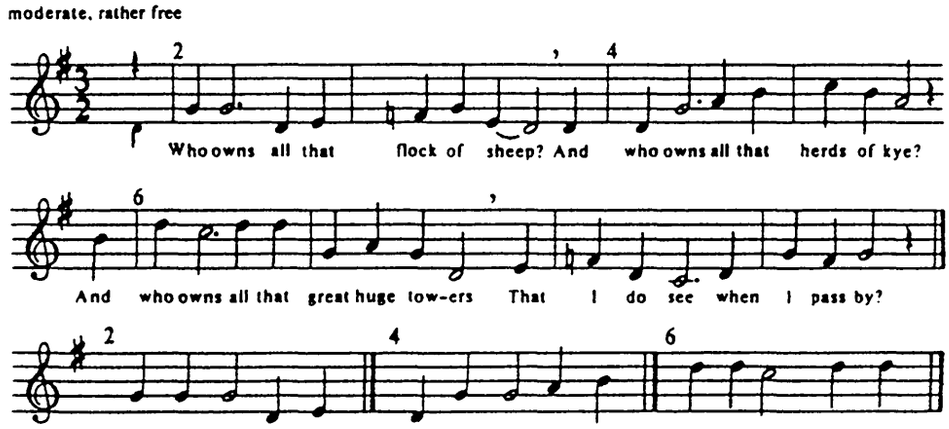
14 O, daughter dear, wipe away your tears,
And dry up your sorrow;
We will wed you to a much higher degree
Than the ploughman boy in Yarrow.

15 O, the dead bells they tolled high and sore,
And they will toll tomorrow;
And every toll they seem to say,
'I will die for him tomorrow.'

By virtue of a detached couplet's final sound rhyming with lines two and four of a following quatrain, an extended verse might be plausible -- what the singer had in mind. "Young Beichan" (CH 53, ex. 2) recorded from Scots traveller Jeannie Thompson by MacColl in 1962, is tightly rhymed with every one of its eight stanzas in the abcb rhyme scheme. It could be presumed that the couplet, vs. 3, is the

first in an extended verse of six lines because in every other stanza two ideas are expressed. If the couplet were tied to the next four lines then two ideas would be presented, as the last two lines of vs. 4 are an embellishment of its line two and do not carry a separate idea.

Example 2. Jeannie Thompson, "Lord Bateman," in MacColl, 1977, pp. 67 - 68.



1 Who owns all that flock of sheep?[a]
And who owns all that herds of kye?[b]
And who owns all that great huge towers[c]
That I do see when I pass by?[b]

2 Lord Bateman owns all these flocks of sheep,[a]
Lord Bateman owns all these herds of kye;[b]
Lord Bateman owns all these great high towers[c]
That we do see as we pass by.[b]

3 What news, what news, now, my little page?[a]
What news, what news do you bring to me?[b]
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

4? 'There are a lady all at your gate, sir;[c]
And the beat of her I did never see,[b]
For there are as much gold all around her body[b]
As would buy your kingdom and another three.[b]

5 She said to send out one bit of your wedding bread,[a]
And one glass of your wedding wine;[b]
And to ne'er forget of a fair young lady[c]
That did release you from close confine.[b]

6 He kicked the table all with his foot,[a]
The cups and saucers he made them flee;[b]
I'll bet any man now my lands and kingdom[c]
It's Susie Pirate from o'er the sea.[b]

7 Out speaks his young bride's mother,[a]
'Twas news to hear her speak so free:[b]
'For you may make a wife o' my daughter[c]
Though Susie Pirate's come o'er the sea.'[b]

8 There is your fine young daughter,[a]
She's not one penny the better or worse of me.[b]
She came here on her horse and saddle,[c]
She may go home in her carriage-and-three.[b]

But a reconstruction of the stanza form as the singer conceived it in performance is speculative without diachronic variants of the ballad from the same singer available for study.

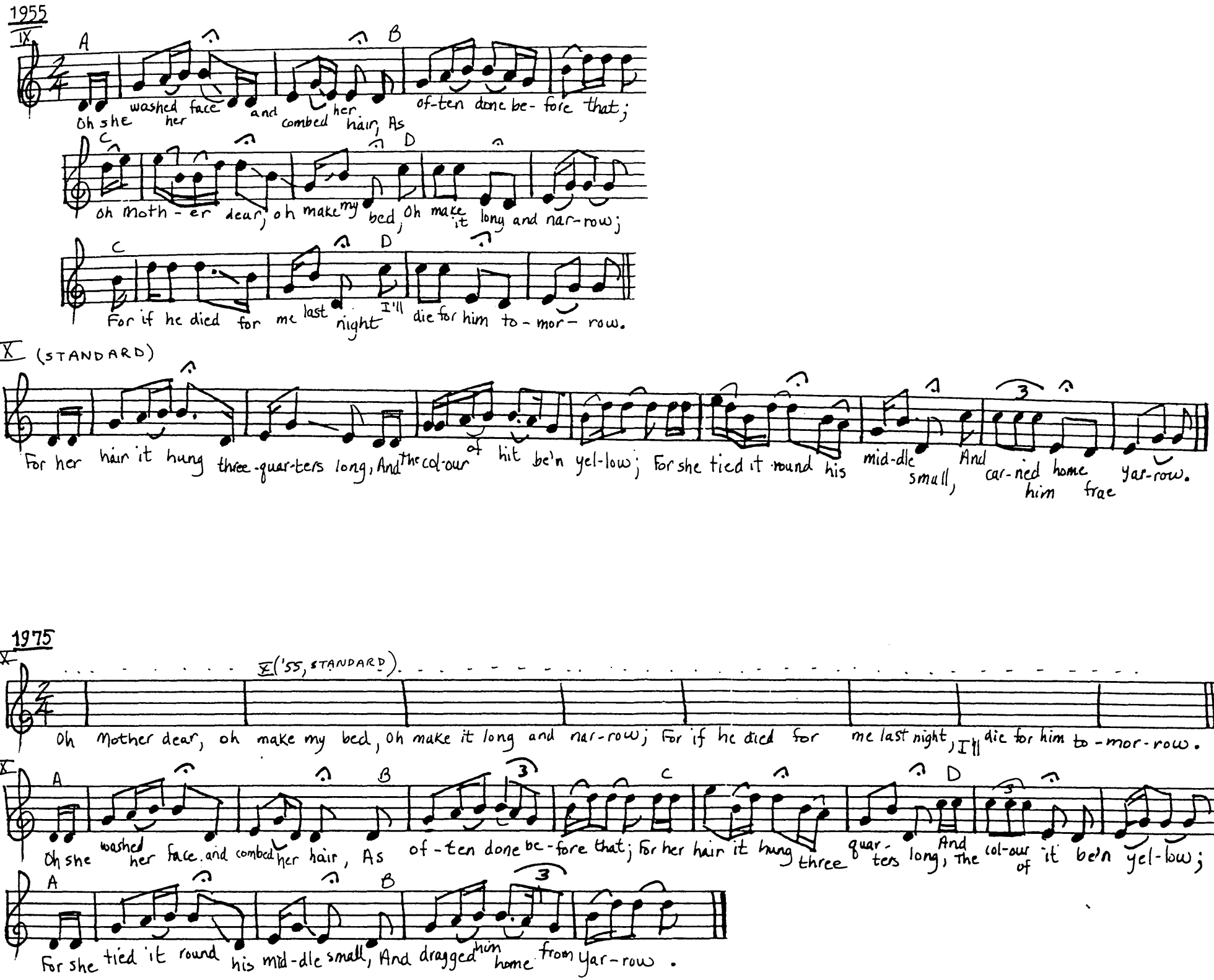
A detached couplet may be a "floater verse," vary in its position, within a narrative song. With respect to its surrounding couplets, "Oh she washed her face and combed her hair / As often done before that," in Martha Johnstone's version of the "Dowie Dens," was floating. In 1955 the couplet occurred before the daughter implores her mother to make her death bed; in the 1975 performance it occurred after the same event. From the two performances recorded from Martha, it was evident that the ballad was fixed in text and tune. The two performances were identical apart from the position of the floating couplet, yet in each performance the couplet was sung to the same half strophe, AB. In 1955 it was the first biphrasal group of the extended penultimate strophe, IX, in the form ABCDCD. In 1975 it was the first biphrasal group in the final strophe, ABCDAB.

To the trained musical ear, the 1975 performance sounds "wrong," ending in midstrophe. And Hendren noted, in his study of traditional ballads on the printed page, that "accommodating a stanza extension of two lines .... by repeating the latter half of the melody is the most natural and obvious proceedure." (1936, p. 41) Thus, Martha's 1955 performance might be judged "more natural" of the two, see ex. three.. However, was the 1975 performance less correct, an unsatisfactory solution to the problem of the floating couplet? Was the musical finish of Martha's "Dowie Dens"

in 1975 a severed musical statement? Or could it be interpreted as an alternative ending, an equally viable ending from the singer's point of view as ending the song with the last biphrasal group, on the final tonic cadence? Other narrative songs performed by Martha e.g., "King William" (CH 7, ex. 7, chapter five), "Barbro Allen" (CH 84) and "Lady o the Drum" (ex. 6, chapter three) were finished in mid-strophe, and all featured a greater or lesser degree of musical improvisation. There is the possibility that the singer "goes wrong" in these narrative performances, but there is another possible answer that the ends of these narratives were improvised by the singer and she was treating the melostrophe as a "fluid combination of phrases."

(Melodic improvisation was a traditional singing practice among the travellers, re. chapter five, II.1. But research into the tradition is not advanced enough to answer 'if' or 'how far' the improvisatory mode was conventional in the context of standard strophe singing. For a relevant example, see ex. 7, chapter five; see also the discussion of the hiatus in Martha's musical and textual forms, II.3.2., chapter five.)

Example 3. Martha Johnstone, "Dowie Dens," final episodes, 55/44 and 75/197/A5.

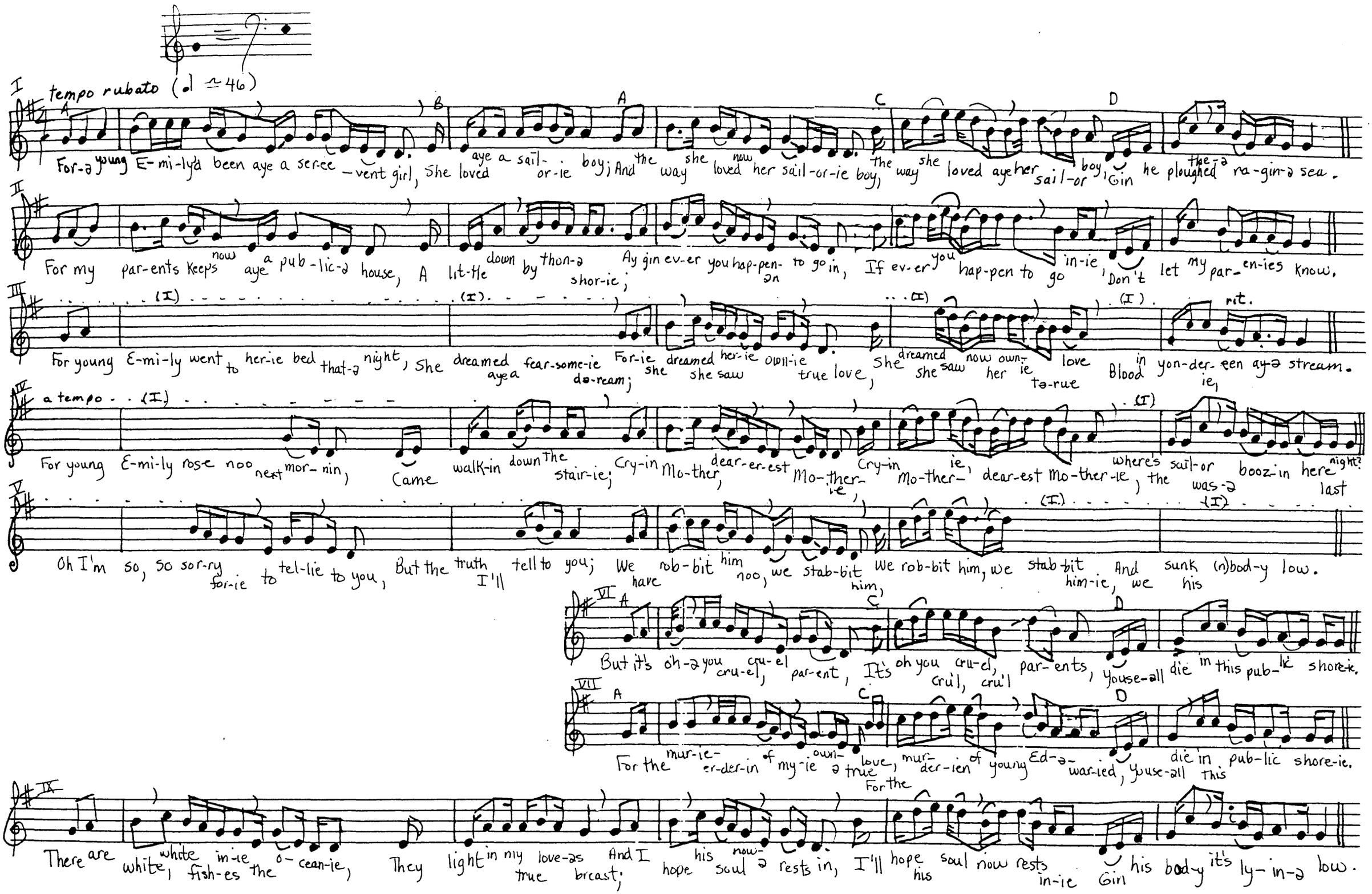


I.1.1. The unified second-half of a standard strophe. Much more common in the author's recordings of narrative songs from travellers was the occurrence of independent half strophes, detached biphrasal groups from the end of a standard quadriphrasal tune. Why there should be a higher frequency of strophic endings than of strophic beginnings, in those songs featuring couplet irregularities, may be conjectural. But MacColl noted that by comparison with English travellers, Scots traveller singers "may have more of a sense of the form of the texts .... than that of the English Travellers, whose tunes produced more pitch and structural variations, ... and more final cadences on a non-tonic note." (p. 25) The Scots song texts were "more complete, more coherent, more structurally sound" than were the song texts sung by English travellers. If the Scots travellers MacColl recorded had a higher regard for form than their English peers, then the Scots travellers' preference for strophic endings — which have a greater sense of finality, finishing on the tonic or a final cadence with less kinetic energy than a medial cadence — may have some correlation with a sense for the restrictive definition of movement.[1] That is, aimless wandering was not characteristic of their musical forms, though that is not to say that irregularities were not prevalent: irregularities had a precise and definite direction, or function.

Johnnie Whyte's "Young Emily" (GR 123) is an excellent example of a narrative song incorporating two reduced strophes to deliver the dramatic climax of the text — verses six and seven, when the daughter vows to murder her parents after they

have confessed to murdering her lover. The ballad was recorded three times from Johnnie, in 1975, 1976 and in 1982. All three performances were identical in text and tune and strophic form, with the exception of the first performance which featured a first strophe minus its first two phrases, in the same form as the reduced strophes VI and VII occurring in all variants. The form of the standard strophe was ABACD, contrasting with the internal repetition of lines in the stanzaic form, ABCCD. The irregular strophes were in the form ACD, the last half of the standard strophe, matching the stanzaic reduction, CCD. The irregular strophes were a fixed part of the narrative version, the song, as Johnnie knew it. The pair of reduced strophes was an expressive device, stressing the emotional height of the story climax. See example 4.

Example 4. Johnnie Whyte, "Young Emily," complete song, 82/188/ A3.



Other examples of narrative songs in which reduced strophes, biphrasal second halves, occur within the framework of regular quadriphrasal strophes have the irregular strophes carrying verses of least dramatic interest. They facilitate the onward sweep of the story, as in Duncan Williamson's "Three Brothers" (CH 188, 84/37/A4, ex. 5). The verses carrying the lines with the brothers' ride to and from Dumfries jail, vv. 7-10, 13, 20 and 23 in example 3, are sung to the detached AC phrase group from the quadriphrasal standard strophe, ABAC. The verses carrying the dialogue between the brother and the sheriff revert to quatrain form. Interesting was the singer's mistake in verse eighteen, a triphrasal strophe resulting from the contraction of phrases (2) and (3) -- mirroring the story's mixture of action on horseback together with the brothers' unspoken joy in the jailbreak: which of these sentiments to express confounded the singer at that point and the second phrase of the strophe was ill-formed.

Example 5. Duncan Williamson, "The Three Brothers," 84/37/A4, complete song. CS

♩ = 60-76

I. I look-it out o my fa-ther's win-dow -twixt Be my gar-den and the wall, And I heard two broth-ers talk-ing, It's oh that they talked so sof-ti-ly.

II. Sayin our broth-er Tom now he lies in jail, The morn's the day that he's gaein to dee; But if I had twa men like my-sel, Oh soon a free man that he would be.

III. Then up an spake the young-est broth-er, Oh, but he spake sae boast-ful-ly; oh sayin Talk me wi ye, Broth-er John and we will gang and get our broth-er free.

IV. Oh ha'd your wheesht, says Broth-er John, It's on-'y a lad-die that ye be! A need twa strong men like my-sel Fir tae get our broth-er free.

V. Then up and spake the young-est broth-er, oh but he spake boast-ful-ly: A-fore the cu(c)lock crows in the morn Our broth-er sure he's gaun ta dee.

VI. Let's get the hor-ses broth-er John, And gang and get wir broth-er free.

VII. So it's on their hor-ses and a-wa they rode Oh, they rode sae swif-ti-ly.

VIII. And when they cam smiddie tae the door They twined their hor-ses' shoes back-for-ward-ly.

IX. Then on their hor-ses and a-wa they rode Oh, but they rode sae swif-ti-ly.

X. And when they came to the An-nan wa-ter Oh hit was like flow-in on-y sea.

XI. Then up and spake the youn-gest broth-er Oh but he spake sae sof-ti-ly, My horse is young and I can-na swim, Oh broth-er John what will I dae?

XII. Cast up be-hind me says broth-er John But din-nae let his bri-dle Free, So on their hor-ses and a-wa they swam, Oh they swam sae sof-ti-ly.

[cont'd]

XIII A C

And when they came to Dum-fries jail Hit bare-ly tries the was at break o day.

XIV A B A C

Oh the first door that tae, John cam He o-pened it noo bith-oot a key And next door that the he cam tae, I'm sure he made it gang in three.

XV (XIII) (XIV)

Stand up, stand up says broth-er John, Oh so that you that I can see; for I have come to Dum-fries jail And I have come for to set you free.

XVI (XV) (XIII) (XV)

Oh had your tongue broth-er noo says Tom, Can you no see what I can see? There's fif-ty pun o swed-ish i-ron my an-kle an my Knee. Be-twixt

XVII (XIV) (XVI) (XVI)

So pick-in him up in-tae his airms, he car-ried him like a but-ter-flee Wi fif-ty pun o Swed-ish i-ron Be-twixt his an-kle and his Knee.

XVIII A (B) (A) C

An-to Their hor-ses they did gang For they had come to Dum-fries jail, Oh for to get their broth-er free.

XIX

Look back, look back says the youn-gest broth-er, Oh do you see what I can see? Yon-der comes the sher-iff bold Wi ten-ty o his com-pa-ny.

XX

But on their hor-ses a-wa they swam, and Oh that they swam so swif-ti-ly.

XXI

When the sher-iff tae the he came wa-ter-side, Oh an an-gry man was he, Shout-in, back cast me my wee bit i-ron Noo you've got yir broth-er free.

XXII (XIV) (XXI) (XIV)

Then up and spoke broth-er noo John, Oh but he spoke sae joy-ful-ly; Oh nev-er a bit o i-ron you'll get, For I have got my broth-er free!

XXIII (IX)

So on their hor-ses and a-wa they swam, Oh but they swam so swif-ti-ly.

XXIV

But when they cam tae the vil-lage toon For there a dance that they did see; And the fin-est dan-cer a-mong them aa, Oh was the pris'ner who got his lib-er-ty.

In support of the theory that the reduced strophes were an expressive device to parallel the advance of the narrative action, an example can be cited when the singer once performed the narrative in exclusively quadriphrasal strophes, 76/33/B2. Every other performance of "Three Brothers" recorded from Duncan, a total of ten variants since 1975, featured the reduced strophes. The 1976 quadriphrasal variant was a performance of the ballad made expressly for written publication in the magazine Tocher at my request. (See Tocher 22, pp. 237-239.) The singer was not intent on giving as much expression to the story as he would have been under more ordinary performing circumstances i.e., for his pleasure or his listeners' enjoyment. The very start of the story in 1976 was less exciting, vv. 4 - 6 of the 1984 variant were not sung and the first dialogue between the two brothers lacked the emotional drama of the 1984 variant.

Two other examples of irregular reduced strophes carrying the narrative action forward, in contrast to the dramatic confrontation between characters being carried by quatrains, may be found in Davie Stewart's "Jolly Beggar" (CH 279) in Tocher 15, pp. 278 - 280 and in John MacDonald's "Sir Hugh" (CH 155), published in MacColl, pp. 87 - 88.

I.2. Contracted Strophes -- Mistakes

One type of strophic reduction that appears to result from memory failure or accidental disturbance of the metre, verbal stumble, is the contraction of a strophe -- when the standard strophe is more or less intact. The beginning and ending of a quadriphrasal strophe are presented but one of the internal phrases suffers abbreviation, truncation or ommission.

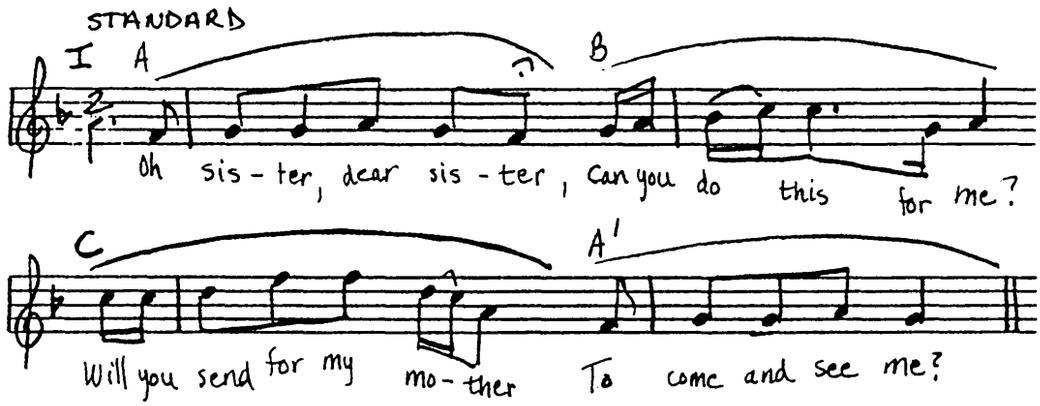
Martha Johnstone's two recorded performances of "Queen Jean" (CH 170) are illustrative of irregularity in strophic structure due to mistakes. The first recorded performance, in 1955, featured a contracted strophe III, carrying the queen's formulaic reply to the formulaic question, "What ails you Queen Jean?" "For my back it is wearied / For A had no sleep this six weeks and mair." The reply is repeated every second verse in Martha's version, and in this instance the singer forgot line two in the first occurrence of the verse, "And my twa sides are sair." That the singer probably did not intend to sing half a strophe or a reduced stanza is evident in the musical setting of the text: while line two was not sung, phrase two was, truncated and extended by a modified (4)B'a, see ex. 6. The coherence of this contracted strophe is remarkable. With the exception of the medial cadence figure, the entire first half of the standard strophe, AB from ABCA, was sung. Omitted entirely was C, but line three of the stanza was clearly formulated, complete in sense though reduced in syllabic ontent. B'a was comprised of only two pitches, the tonic and the third, before the cadence on the 2nd. The 3rd scale degree was the medial cadence of the standard strophe and also the cadence of C(3). Thus, while C(3) was not sung directly, its major pitches were reiterated; its highest pitch, the highest in the standard strophe, was also echoed in its lower octave equivalent, see III in ex. 6.

The irregular strophe, IX, in the 1957 performance of "Queen Jean" also featured the salient pitches of the phrases from the standard strophe which were contracted. In 57, IX, the first half of the standard strophe was reduced: A was truncated and extended by B, with its

central pitches omitted; the medial cadence figure of the standard strophe was intact along with the second half of the strophe. See 57/IX/A, ex. 6. The stumble at the beginning of vs. 9 upset the poetic metre, resulting in the loss of the last half of line one of the quatrain — a mistake.

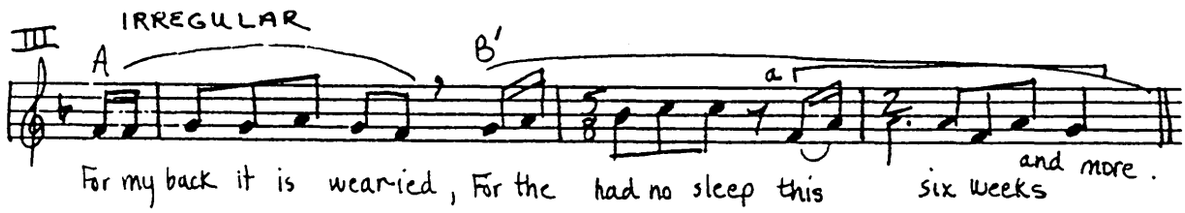
Example 6. Martha Johnstone, "Queen Jean," 55/51, complete song. Followed by the irregular strophe IX from the 1957 performance, 57/7.

1955



II

For the mother was sent for
And immediantely came; [sic]
Sittin doun by her bedside —
What ails you Queen Jean?



IV

Oh Mother, dear Mother,
Will you do this for me:
Will you send for my father
To come and see me?

V
A For the father was sent for
B And immediantely came;
C Sittin doun by her bedside —
A' What ails you Queen Jean?

VI
A For my back it is wearied,
B My twa sides are sair,
C And I didnae get a wink o sleep
A' Thes six weeks and mair.

VII
A Oh Father, dear Father,
B Will you do this for me:
C Will you send for King Hendry
A' For tae come and see me?

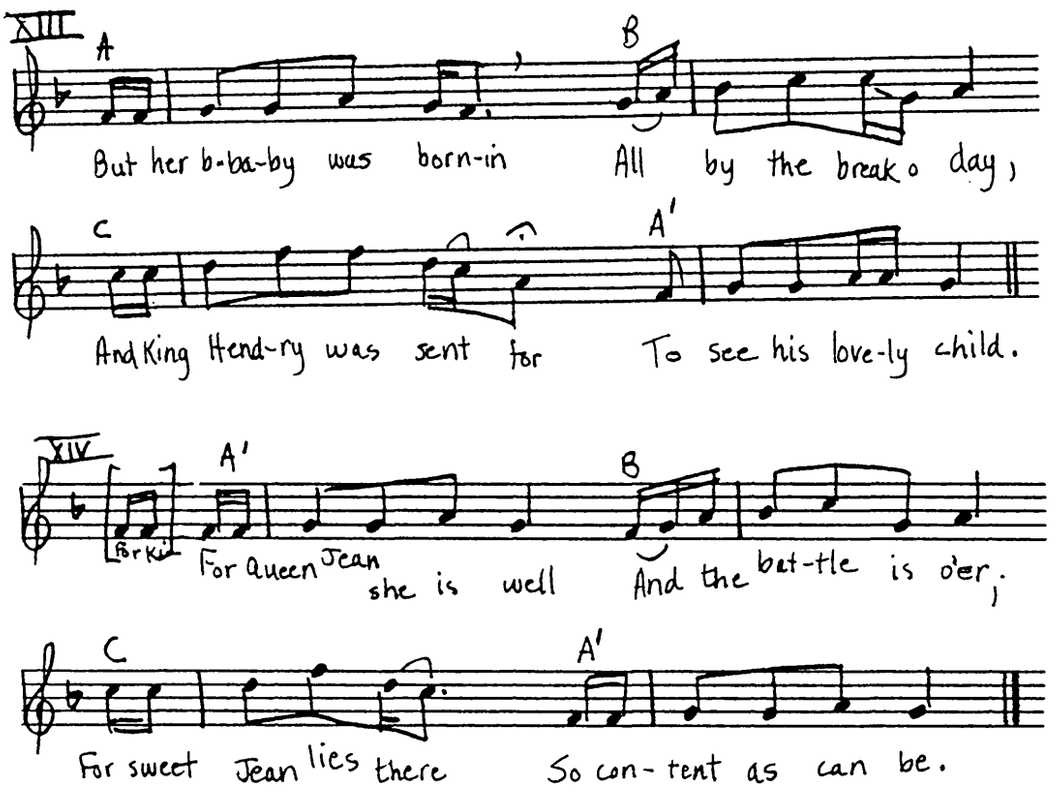
VIII
A King Hendry was sent for
B And immediantely came;
C Sittin doun by her bedside —
A' What ails you Queen Jean?

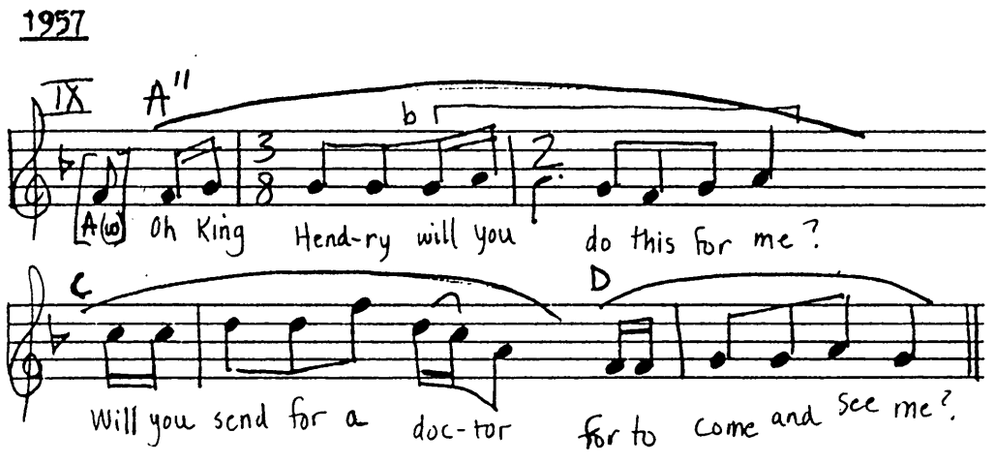
IX
A For my back it is wearied,
B My twa sides are sair,
C And I didnae get a wink o sleep
A' Thes six weeks and mair.

X
A Oh Hendry, dear Hendry,
B Will you do this for me:
C Will you send for the doctor
A' To come an see me?

XI
A For the doctor was sent for
B And immediantely came;
C Sittin doun by her bedside —
A' What ails you Queen Jean?

XII
A For my back it is wearied,
B My twa sides are sair,
C And I didnae get a wink o sleep
A' Thes six weeks and more.

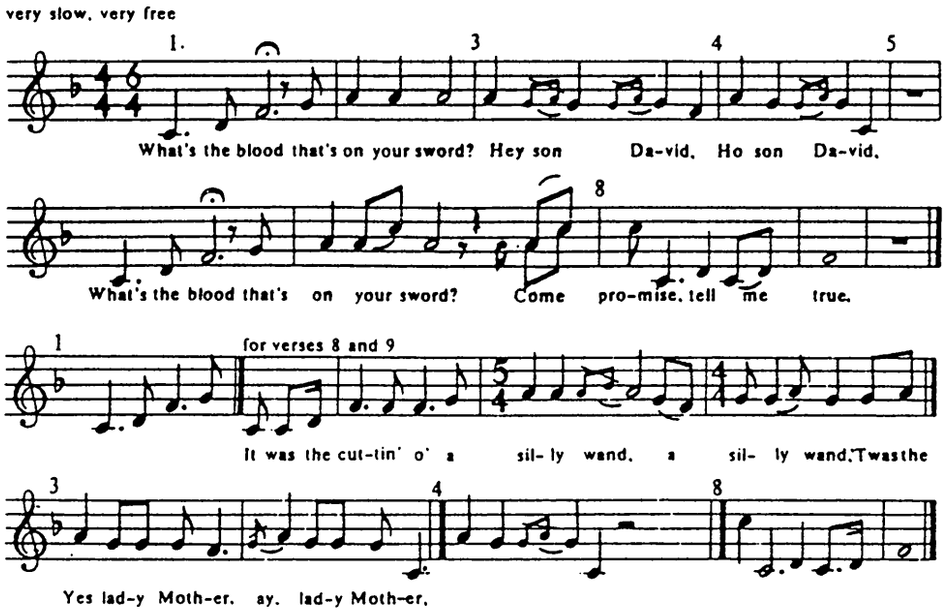




II. Refrain Omission and its Intentionality

An excellent example of refrain omission, too obvious and too meaningful to be anything less than the singer's intention, occurs in Maria Robertson's performance of "Edward" (CH 13, ex. 7). After singing seven quatrains with the interlaced refrain pattern in every stanza; verses eight and nine, the denouement and climax of the dramatic dialogue between mother and son, have no refrain. Line two of vs. 8 was severely reduced, sung to a contracted (2), which may be analyzed as an extension of (1). The stopping of the interlaced refrain pattern for the last two stanzas of the song was to effect the height of the drama, revealing the crime of fratricide -- a revelation framed in two-fold repetitions of the irrational cause of the murder--arguing over "a silly wand;" and stress the death metaphor, "a bottomless boat."

Example 7. Maria Robertson, "My Son David," in MacColl, pp. 59 - 60.



Note: Mrs Robertson uses many mordants and often slides up to a note. Bar 5 is often omitted completely.

1 What's the blood that's on your sword?
Hey son David, Ho son David,
What's the blood that's on your sword?
Come promise, tell me true.

2 That's the blood of my grey mare,
Yes lady Mother, ay, lady Mother,
That's the blood of my grey mare,
Because it wadna rule by me.

3 That blood is far too clear,
Hey son David, Ho son David,
That blood is far too clear,
Come promise, tell me true.

4 That's the blood of my hunting hack,
Yes lady Mother, ay, lady Mother,
That's the blood of my hunting hack,
Because it wadna rule by me.

5 That blood is far too clear,
Hey son David, Ho son David,
That blood is far too clear,
Come promise, tell me true.

6 That's the blood of my brother John,
Yes lady Mother, ay, lady Mother,
That's the blood of my brother John,
When he drew his sword to me.

7 What way did youse fall out?
Hey son David, Ho son David,
What way did youse fall out?
Come promise, tell me true.

8 It was the cuttin' o' a silly wand,
— A silly wand,
'Twas the cuttin' o' a silly wand
— When he drew his sword to me.

9 I'm gaun awa' in a bottomless boat,
— In a bottomless boat,
I'm gaun awa' in a bottomless boat,
— And a good scholar I'll come hame.

Testimonies from three traveller men singers were recorded about their positive dislike of either the interlaced refrain or the burden of narrative songs they'd performed. John MacDonald, Johnnie Whyte and Duncan Williamson offered the same critical remarks after singing refrain ballads. These may be insightful to an understanding of irregularity in those songs.

John MacDonald (of Lanarkshire)

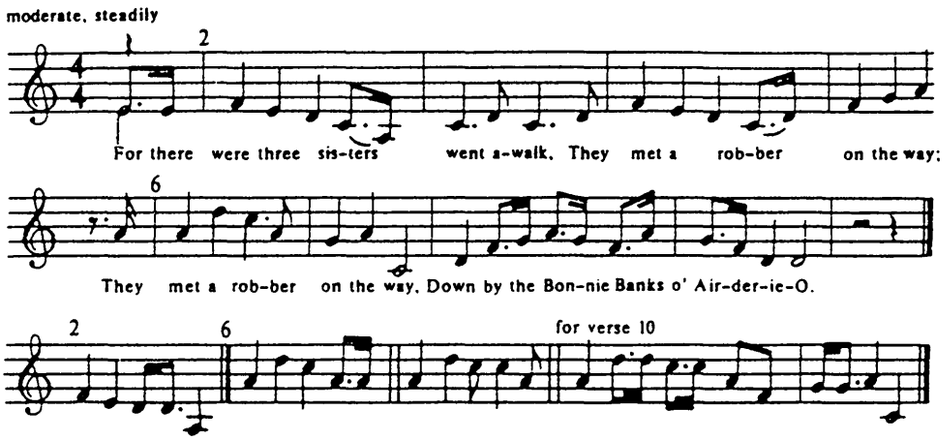
John sang two narrative songs with refrains, CH 2 and CH 14. Another refrain ballad, "Lord Randal," was also recorded from him on one occasion, and it is a singular example of this ballad without its usual interlaced refrain; but its unusual tri-phrasal form can be related to a similar treatment of the interlaced form of Child 14 by traveller Martha Johnstone, see ex. 9 below.

Child 14. Two performances of this ballad were recorded from John, one in 1969 (in MacColl, 1977, pp. 62-3) and one in 1976 by me. The text differed slightly in the latter performance when John changed "Airderie-O" to "Airlie-O" in the burden of the last three verses. After singing them, he said,

> It's supposed to be 'Airlie' as there are no banks about the Airdrie. .... Too much 'Down by the bonnie banks o Airlie' — I don't like things repeatin. I like the songs that go straight ahead.
>
> (76/27/A1)

MacColl compared John's version with all other published texts of the ballad and noted that John's was singular in its stanzaic form: without the interlaced refrain, but with line three repeating line two, see ex. 8.

Example 8. John MacDonald, "Banks o Airderie-O," in MacColl, pp. 62 - 3.



1 For there were three sisters went a-walk,
They met a robber on the way;
They met a robber on the way,
Down by the Bonnie Banks o' Airderie-O.

2 He took the first one by the hand,
He twirled her round till he made her stand;
He twirled her round till he made her stand,
Down by the Bonnie Banks o' Airderie-O.

3 It's will you be a robber's wife?
Or will you die by my penknife?
Or will you die by my penknife?
Down (etc.)

4 It's I'll no' be a robber's wife,
But I will die by your penknife,
O, I will die by your penknife, (etc.)

5 He catched the second one by the hand,
He twirled her round till he made her stand,
It's will you be a robber's wife? (etc.)

6 It's I'll no' be a robber's wife.
But I will die by your penknife;
But I will die by your penknife, (etc.)

7 He catched the third one by the hand,
He twirled her round till he made her stand;
He twirled her round till he made her stand, (etc.)

8 It's will you be a robber's wife?
Or will you die by my penknife?
Or will you die by my penknife? (etc.)

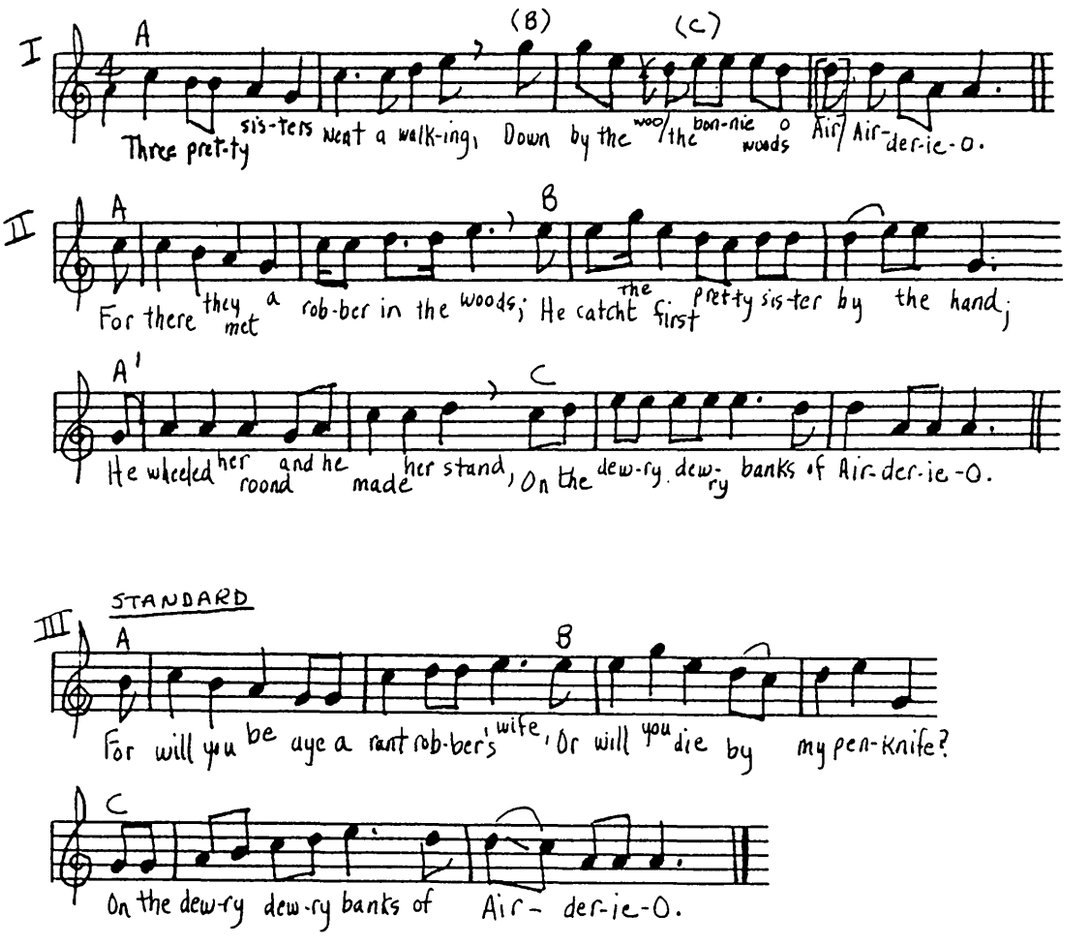
9 If my two brothers was here this night,
You wadna be sae keen and bright:
If my two brothers was here this night, (etc.)

10 What does your two brothers do?
The one is James and the other is John;
The one is a minister, the tither's like you, (etc.)

11 Ah, my God, what have I done?
I've kilt my three sisters all but one;
I've kilt my three sisters all but one, (etc.)

Although MacColl had described John's repeated verse-lines, instead of the interlaced refrain form, "a form unprecedented in any of the printed texts" (p. 61); John's version seems to be fairly common among the Scots travellers -- the ones I have heard. I have recorded the ballad from three other travellers and theirs' also had no interlaced refrains. Jock and Mary Williamsons' version was sung to the same quadriphrasal strophe as John's and the same quatrain form, with line three repeating either line one or two, re. ex. 1, Conclusion (Mary) and 76/49/A5 (Jock). Martha Johnstone's version was a regression of the quadriphrasal form, a three-line stanza sung to a triphrasal strophe minus the second phrase of the strophe as was sung by the Williamsons. Martha's version had no repeated lines except the burden recurring in every verse, see ex. 9. The opening of the narrative was typically problematic and improvisatory, cf. ex. 6, chapter 5. Here may be noted her full quatrain form, ABA'C at II, a variant of John's standard strophe AA'BC with internal phrases exchanged.

Example 9. Martha Johnstone, "Banks o Airderie-O," 78/109/A3.



4 I won't be aye a rant robber's wife,
I would rather die be your penknife;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

5 He catcht the second pretty sister by thye hand,
He wheeled her roond and he made her stand;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

6 Will you be aye a rant robber's wife,
Or shall you die by my penknife?
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

7 Oh I'll not be aye a rant robber's wife,
I would rather die by your penknife;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

8 He catcht the third pretty sister by the hand,
He wheeled her roond and he made her stand;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

9 Oh will you be aye a rant robber's wife,
Or shall you die by my penknife?
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

10 I'll not be aye a rant robber's wife,
I'll not die by your penknife;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

11 I have a brother in this wood,
If you kill me he is sure to kill you;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

12 Oh come tell to me aye your brother's name,
Come tell to me aye your brother's name;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

13 My brother's name's Bold Robber John,
And if you kill me he is sure to kill you;
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

14 Oh dearie me what is this I have done,
I've killed my three pretty sisters all but one!
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie-O.

It is clear from these examples, and from John MacDonald's performances of other refrain ballads (cf. MacColl, pp. 49, 56), that some travellers, including the Williamsons and Martha Johnstone, prefer to sing texts without the high incidence of vocable repetition. Finding repetition of verse lines dissatisfying in performance of a narrative, a traveller singer may omit one internal line altogether.

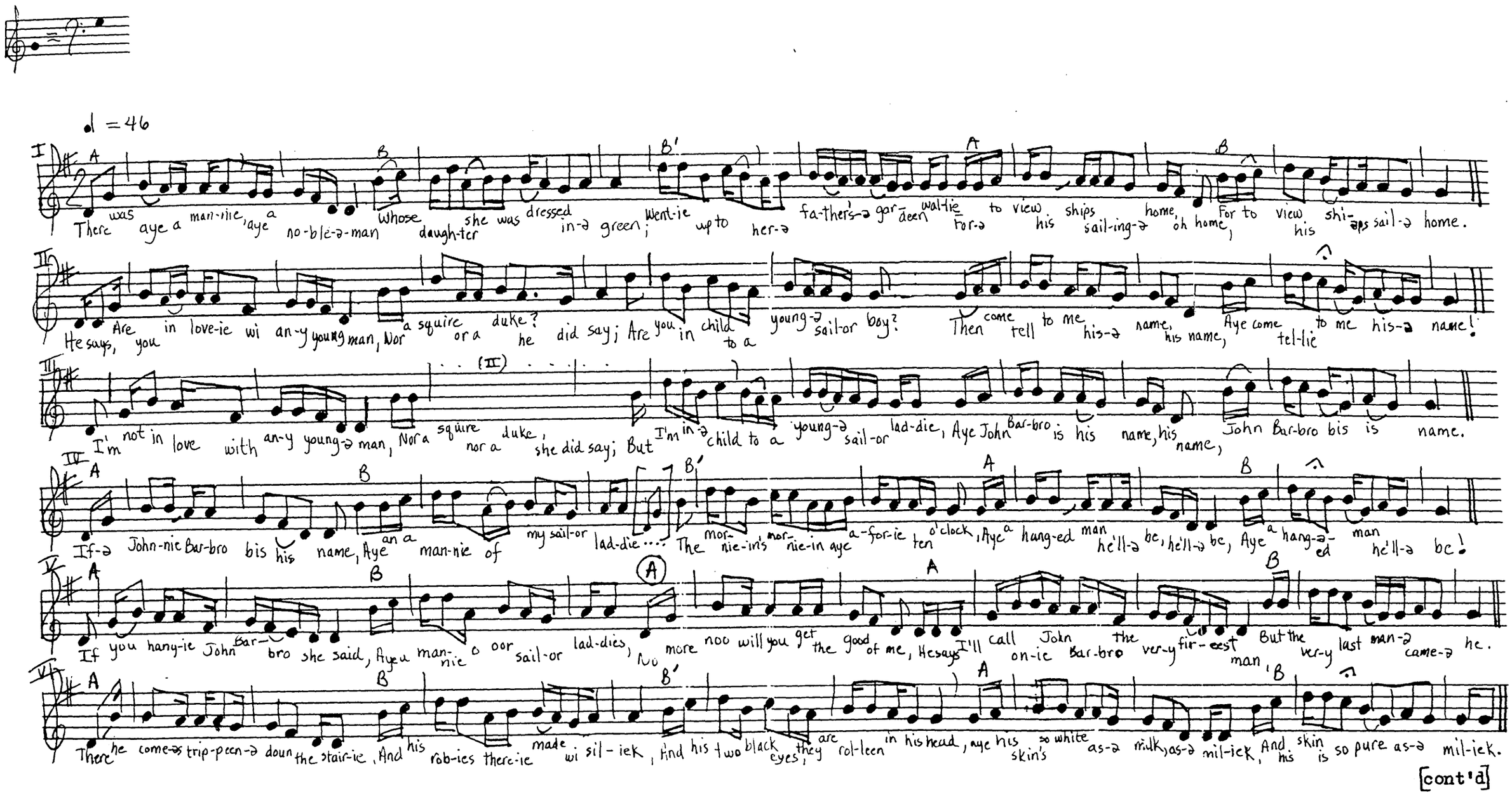
Johnnie Whyte

Johnnie expressed dislike of the interlaced refrain in his version of Child 10, recorded four times from 1975 - 1977. The very first recording was delivered with a comment after

verse one, "I tell ye, it's nearly the same thing repeated aa the time." (75/106/B4) While that wasn't overtly negative, the third recorded performance in 1976 was followed by the criticism, "It's a long long song. It's the same thing, it's the same thing and that's what I hate about it." (76/213/A1) Every one of the thirteen verses of the narrative song was sung with the interlaced refrain, even the expanded verse ten, discussed below. However, the final verse was reduced to a triphrasal strophe minus the second phrase and line of the quatrain, the first half of the interlaced refrain. See ex. 11, section three below. There was no reason for the omission other than for the sake of the story, the denouement. The irregular reduced strophe was a fixed feature of the ballad as Johnnie sang it, occurring in each of three recorded performances.

Another narrative Johnnie sang,"John Barbro" (CH 100), featured a fixed irregularity of refrain omission in the middle verse, 5, of every recorded performance (three from 1975 - 1977). The omission was undoubtedly intended, to highlight the dramatic confrontation between father and daughter over her choice of a sailor as her lover. The stanzaic pattern is broken at that point of the story; the fifth line repeat of four is substituted by a contrasting idea — underlining the rebellious nature of the daughter's committement. The strophic form, established in I - IV as ABB'AB, is also disrupted, altered to ABAAB and coinciding with the emotional vow of the girl, "No more noo will you get the good of me," sung to the return of A for (3) instead of B'; which was immediately followed by the usual A(4), and the father's expected response. See ex. 10. The irregular final strophe will be discussed in the next section, expanded strophes.

Example 10. Johnnie Whyte, "John Barbro," 76/214/A1, complete song.



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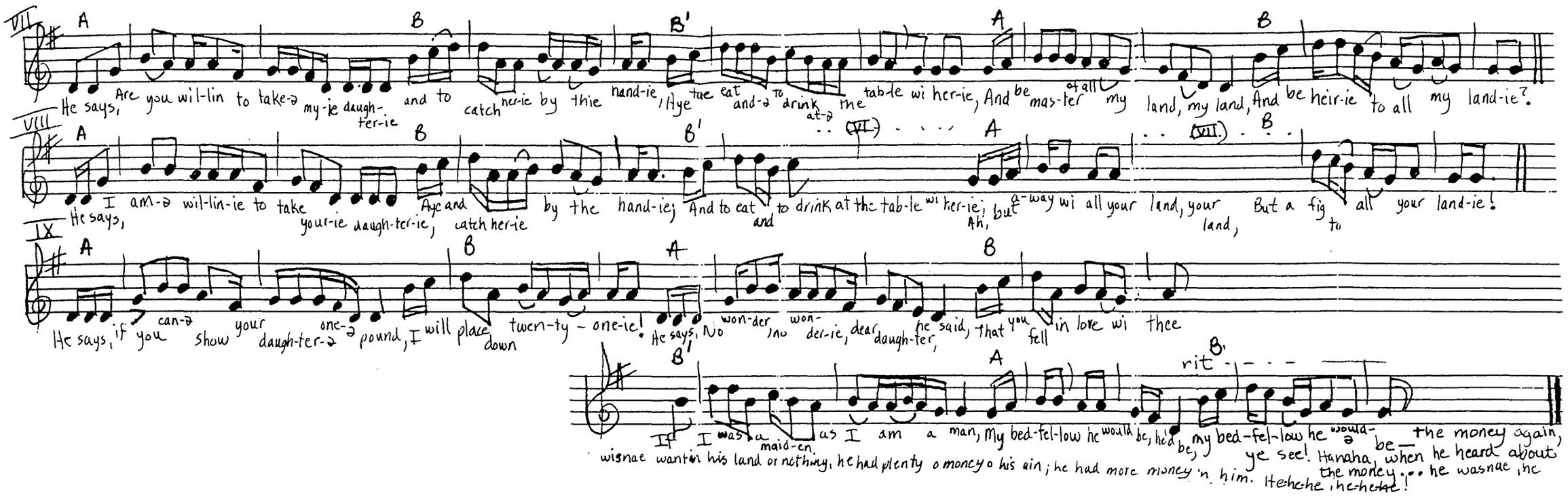


Duncan Williamson

Child 17. Duncan sings only one ballad with an interlaced refrain, "Hind Horn" (ex. 2 , chapter two) and he rarely sings it but on request because he is dissatisfied with the frequency of the vocable line, "O lee-lye and sae lonely O," repeated in every verse as the second and fourth lines. After the 1977 performance for traveller Mary Stewart, in company with the Whytes of Montrose, when Duncan offered the ballad to his audience, he discussed the reason for his dissatisfaction with the refrain. While "Hind Horn" does not feature any reduced strophes, the idea expressed by Duncan in the discussion after the performance of the ballad in 1977 throws light on the refrain omission in one of his often performed narratives, "Lady Margaret" (CH 39).

Immediately after singing the thirty-one verse variant of "Hind Horn" in 1977, Duncan said, "There're too many 'lee-lyes' and too many 'lee-lows' in it for my sake." (77/202/A2) I then posed the question,

L — What do you think of that song?

D — Well, I think it's a good song if there werena so many lee-lyes and so many lee-lows in it.

L — Why don't you like the 'lee-lyes?'

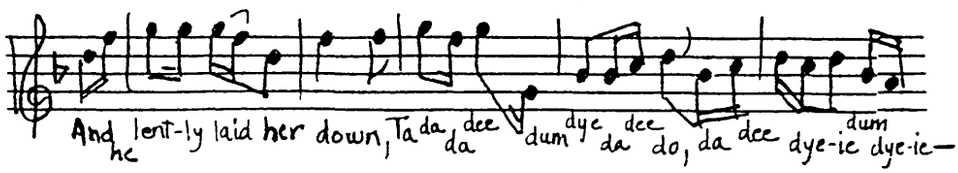
D — I think it distracts the attention of folks that's listenin tae the song, because they get bored listenin tae so many . . .

L — What do you think the 'lee-lyes' are doing in there? Why are they in there in the first place?

D — It's just something, the lee-lyes and the lee-lows are jist something tae stop . . . the lee-lyes and the lee-lows are something that was meant tae, in-atween the song tae make up for the lines that wasnae said, tae make up for the lines that wasnae said.

L — Why would there be lines that weren't said?

D — Well, why there were lines that werenae said is just something made up to the story that wasnae said, tae cover up for something that wasnae said other-wise, ye see what A mean. My sister used tae sing .... well, they would do it because, she said, she took 'Lady Margaret' into something . . . she says .... (I'm tryin to tell you the truth). She said, 'He took her gently by the hand



They didnae want tae say what was meant in atween, right! In atween the lines, they didnae want to say what was in atween the lines.

....

Bryce Whyte — But they kennt what that meant.

D — They knew what it meant and I know what it meant, I know what it meant.

Br — Same as speakin cant.

D — Same as speakin cant .... and everybody knows what it meant, but tae make something nice . . .

(77/202/A3)

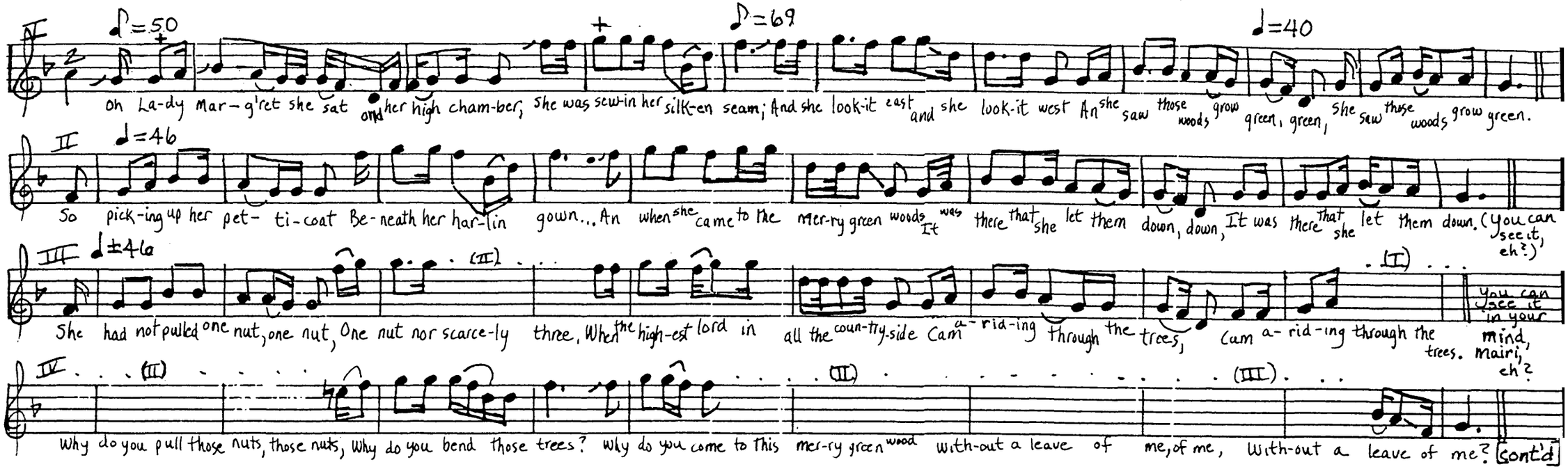
This interpretation of the function of refrains is not in accordance with the conventional idea of ballad scholars who think, "Refrains often reduced themselves to non-sequiturs, entirely lacking in both sense and function;" (Edson, 1978, p. 95) or that refrains are exclusively musical elements. (Hendren, 1936, p. 124)

Child 39. In support of Duncan's comment about the relevance of the refrain to the covert meaning of a story, his performances of "Lady Margaret" (CH 39) are positive evidence. This ballad is sung with an end line refrain which is optional at the most sensual part of the story, when William "gets the will o her." Singing the ballad to a young unmarried nontraveller woman, Mairi MacArthur, Duncan omitted the refrain for those verses when Lord William "gently laid her down," vv. 6 - 8, and included the last line repeat for every verse before and after that part of the story. Duncan intended the performance to be a graphic portrayal of the story, note his comments at the ends of verses two and three. But he did not wish to communicate anything "unmentionable" to Mairi in the part of the story where he omitted the refrain. See ex. 11.

The next performance of the song, in the third week of January 1984 (not tape recorded), for Mary Whyte of Montrose, featured an omission of the repeated end line for every stanza until verse six, the "laying her down" sequence, and the identification of Lord William. Mary Whyte was a young married traveller woman and Duncan felt at ease performing the refrain line with its connotations. It might be conclud-

ed that the refrain in "Lady Margaret" will be optional, depending on the audience and the singer's ability or inability to establish a rapport with the listener/receiver. Duncan has since explained (Interviews, Feb. and Dec. 1984) that the refrain is for the participation of the listener in song, a factor in performance certainly emphasizing the important social function of the refrain and its meaning — when it is and is not sung by the narrator.

Example 11. Duncan Williamson, "Lady Margaret," 84/37/A5; complete song. CS



She said, Once on time those woods were mine With-out a leave of yours! And I can pull those nuts, those nuts, And I can bend those trees, those trees, And I can bend those tree!

♩ = ±48

He took her gent-ly by the hand And he gent-ly laid her down, And when he had his will of her He rose her up a-gain.

She said, Now you've had your will of me Come tell to me your name! And if a ba-by I do have, I will call him the same!

He said, I'm an ear-l's son from Car-lisle And I own all those woods so green; But I was tak-en when I was young by an ev-il fair-y queen.

rubato

But to-mor-row night is Hal-low-een And all those no-bles you can see; But if you will come to the five-mile gate, It is there can you set me free, It is there you can set me free.

Oh first there'll come some dark, some durk, And then they will come some brown; But when there comes a white-milk steed You must pull its rid-er down, down, you must pull its rid-er down.

cont'd

Oh first he'll turn to a li-on wild And then to a wick-ed snake! But hold me fast and fear me not For I'm one of God's own make, I am one of God's own make!

Then I'll turn to a nak-ed man, Oh an an-gry man I'll be! Just throw your man-tle o-ver me And then you'll have me free, And then you'll have me free!

So that night at the mid-night hour La-dy Mar-g'ret made her way; And when she came to the five-mile gate, She wait-ed pa- tient-ly-ly, she wait-ed pa- tient-ly.

Oh first came there some dark, some dark, And then there came some brown; But when there came a milk-white steed, She pulled its rid-er down, down, She pulled its rid-er down.

First he turned to a li-on wild And then to a wick-ed snake; She held him fast and feared him not, He was one of God's own make, He was one of God's own make.

Then he turned to a na-ked man, Oh an an-gry man was he; She threw her man-tle o-ver him, And then she had him free, And then she had him free.

Then cried'e voice of the fair-y queen, Oh an an-gry queen was she; Say'n, If I had o know-en yes-ter- day, O what I know to- day,

I'd took out your ver-y heart's blood And put in a heart of clay, clay, And put in a heart of clay.

So La-dy Mar-g'ret on the white- milk steed, Lord Wil-liam on the dap-ple grey, With the bugle and the horn hang-in down by their side, It's mer-ri-ly they rode a-way-way, It's mer-ri-ly they rode a-way.

III. The Expanded Strophe and its Function

According to traveller storyteller and singer Duncan Williamson, every story has three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end. The study of strophic irregularity in travellers' narrative song performance may be understood in light of this fundamental organization of "every story." The climax of a story in song, the major turning point in a story, or the point of greatest dramatic tension may be marked by an expanded strophe — lengthening or widening the particular scene to underscore its importance. Rarely does a narrative end with an expanded strophe, for the irregularity of expansion requires a moment of assuagement, a levelling after the climax or dramatic height.

An exception is Johnnie Whyte's "John Barbro," example six, above. This narrative ended with the story climax, coinciding with the denouement, carried by an expanded strophe. Significantly, Johnnie spoke a concluding explanation to the stanza, reiterating the father's overriding concern that his daughter marry a wealthy man so that he should benefit from having a rich son-in-law! The effect of the expanded strophe in performance was such that it demanded an assuasive line, to provide a descent from the emotional height achieved by the performance. The same phenomenon of spoken conclusions to songs was observed and explained by Ó Canainn of sean-nos singers:

> He was not merely singing the story but attempting by musical means to do much more. Sean-nos singing is an expression of something which goes beyond mere singing .... When the sean-nos singer of today speaks the last few words of the song, instead of singing them, he is telling his audience that all is over, that he is bringing us back down from the heights of our involvement in the sean-nos experience.
>
> (1978, p. 80)

More typically an expanded strophe occurs in a narrative song before the final scene of the story. As, for example, in Johnnie Whyte's "Twa Sisters," when the wonderful exposition of the fiddlers' making a magical instrument out of the drowned girl's body parts is set to a three-fold repetition of the first two phrases of the standard strophe. This nine phrase strophe was a fixed irregularity in the version as the Whytes and Kelbys have been recorded singing it, re. MacColl, pp. 52-53 and The Muckle Sangs, TGM MD119, A/10.

Evidence of the intentionality of the expanded strophe was given in a discussion of this part of the song with the singer and his brother, Bryce Whyte, after Johnnie's performance of the narrative for the author in 1975:

> J — It's a long song that, though. .... Ye see, that was the breistbone that they made the fiddle to play the tune alone. That was supposed to be at the fiddle that gied her, the sister, away. She said, 'There sits my father the king.' Ye see, it's the fiddle supposed to be sayin that .... her sister's breistbone. That's the way it goes.
>
> L — And I like the part where it speeds up.
>
> J — Aha! But that's the way it goes, but I cannae come aroond it sae good as what I used tae dae.
>
> Br — Many traivellers sings it that way, but that's the proper—
>
> J — But that's the proper way. But I cannae say it the same as what I used tae dae, at one time. .... Well,

that's the proper way it should be sung, that's the proper way it's sung.

Br — That is the tickly bit.

J — That is the tickly bit, that's the way she [my mother] sung it.

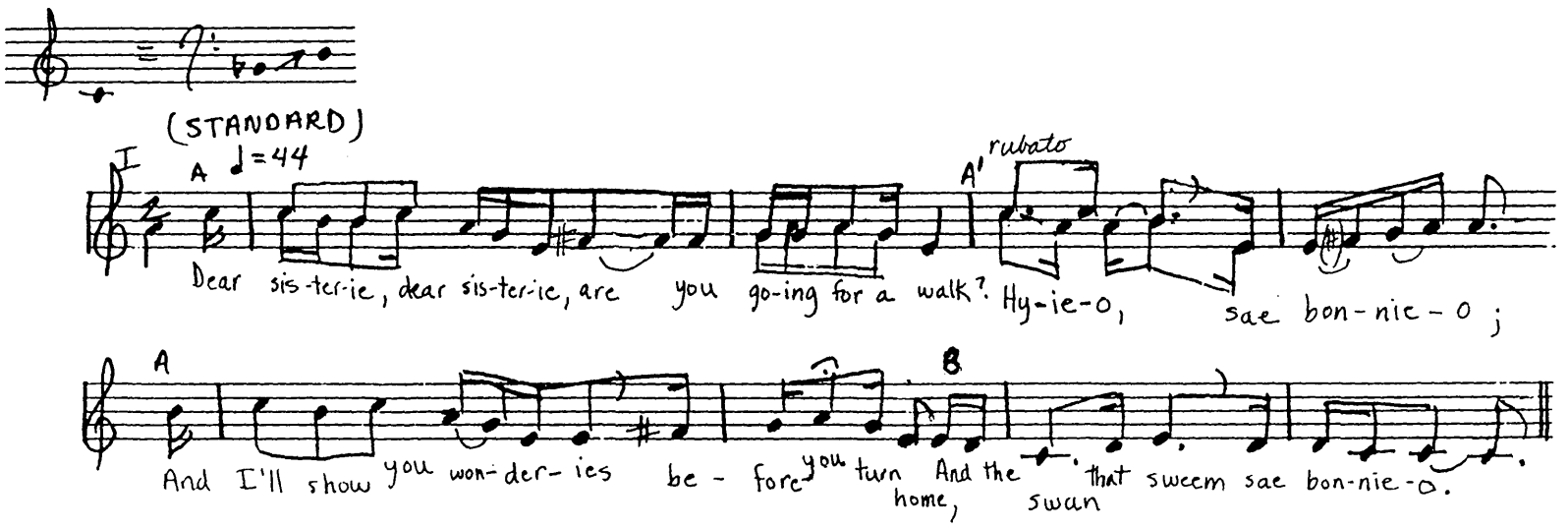
Br — None, hardly any of the travellers can dae that bit.

J — .... Aye, well you see the tune, that was to let her father ken, lettin her father and mother ken referring to the tickly bit . That was supposed to be her comin back in the fiddle, ... That's hoo the story goes, ye ken, ye've got tae tak it up.

(75/106/B5)

The form of the "tickly bit" was AA'AA'AA'AA''B. A'' was an expanded phrase in dotted rhythm revealing the magical essence of the fiddle in a dance-like pattern; the longer text line was sung in faster tempo and phrased without a break into the refrain, see. ex. 12.

Example 12. Johnnie Whyte, "The Swan Sweems sae Bonnie-O," 75/106/B4; complete song.
CS



II

Dear sister, dear sisterie, we'll go for a walk,
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
If you show me wonderies before we come home,
And the swan it sweems sae bonnie-o.
(speech)

II

Dear sister, dear sisterie, we'll go for a walk,
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
If you show me wonderies before we come home,
And the swan at sweem sae bonnie-o.

III

Dear sisterie, dear sisterie, put your footən on marəble stonie,
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
And I'll show you that wonderie before we turn home,
And the swan at sweem sae bonnie-o.

IV

Dear sisterie, dear sisterie, I put my foot on the marble stonie,
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
But sly she throwed her against aye the stream,
And the swan at sweems sae bonnie-o.

V

Dear sister, dear sisterie, will you take my handie?
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
And I'll make you mistress of all my father's landie,
And the swan that sweem sae bonnie-o.
(mistake)

VI

Sometime she sunk noo, other time she swum,
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
At last 'he came to the millerie's dam,
And the swan that sweem sae bonnie-o.

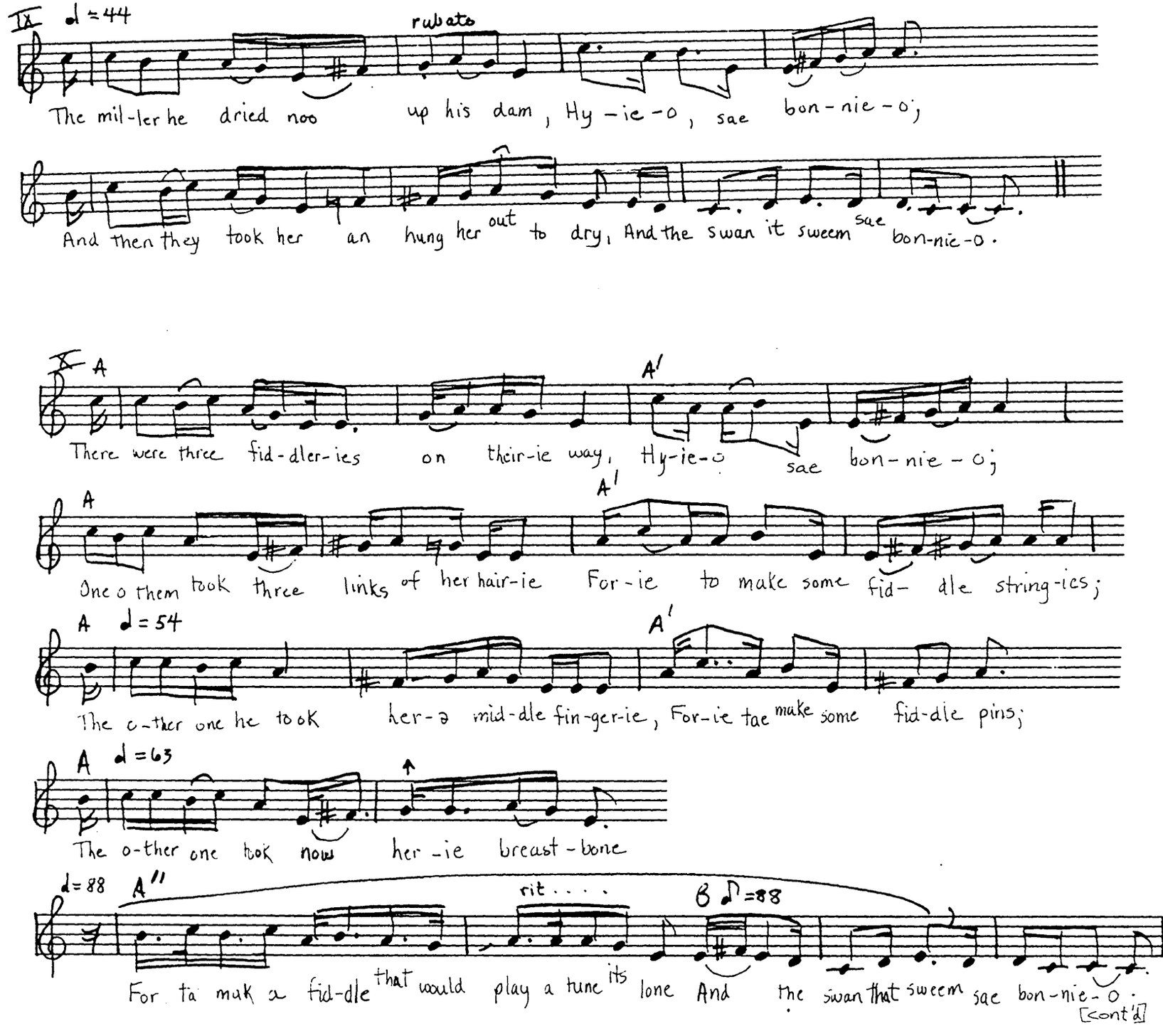
VII

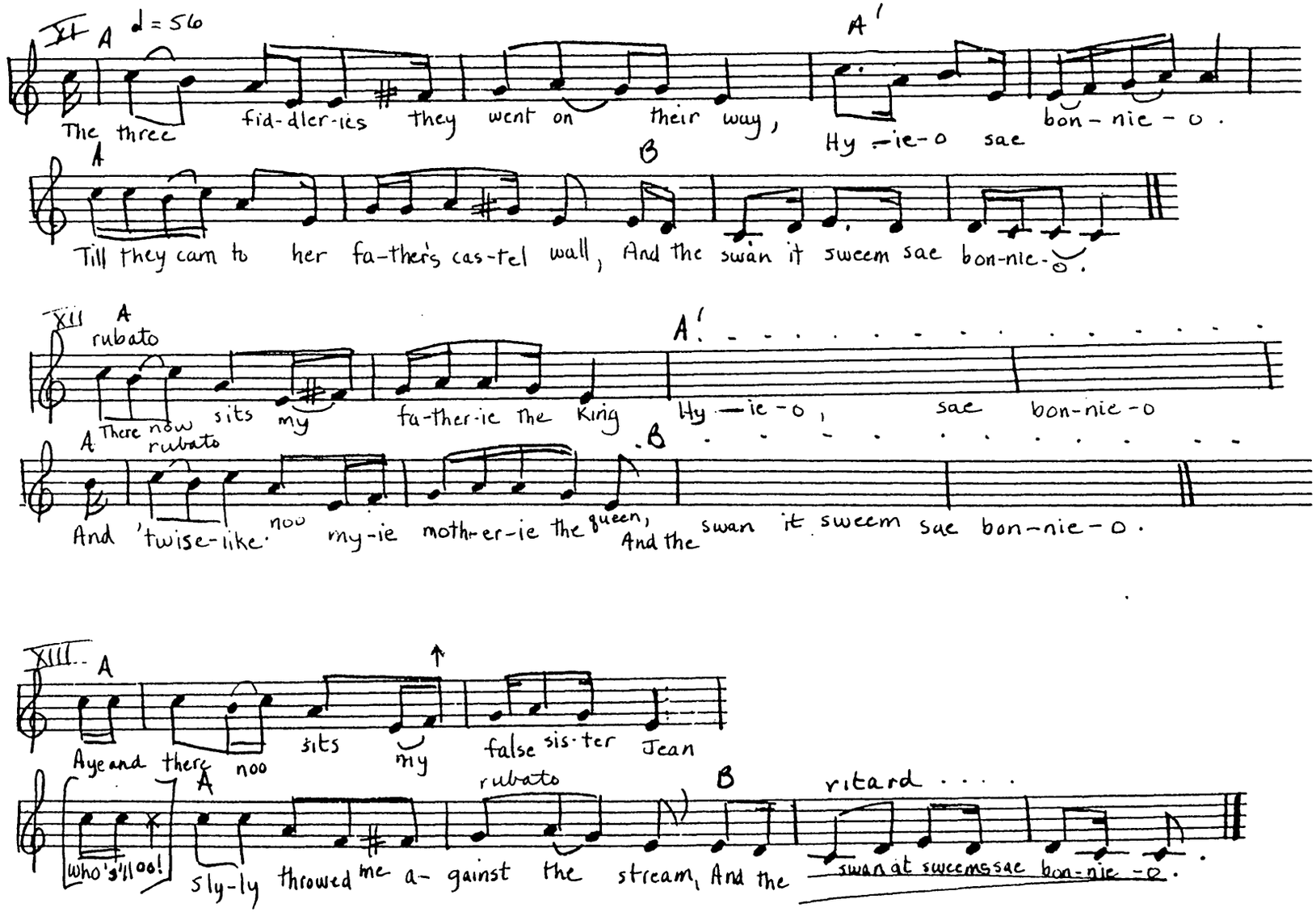
The millerie's maiden was out forie some waterie,
He-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
I see a maiden or a whitemilk swan,
And the swan that sweem sae bonnie-o.

VIII

Oh miller, oh millerie, oh dry up your dam,
Hy-ie-o, sae bonnie-o;
I see a maiden or a whitemilk swanie,
And the swan at sweems sae bonnie-o.

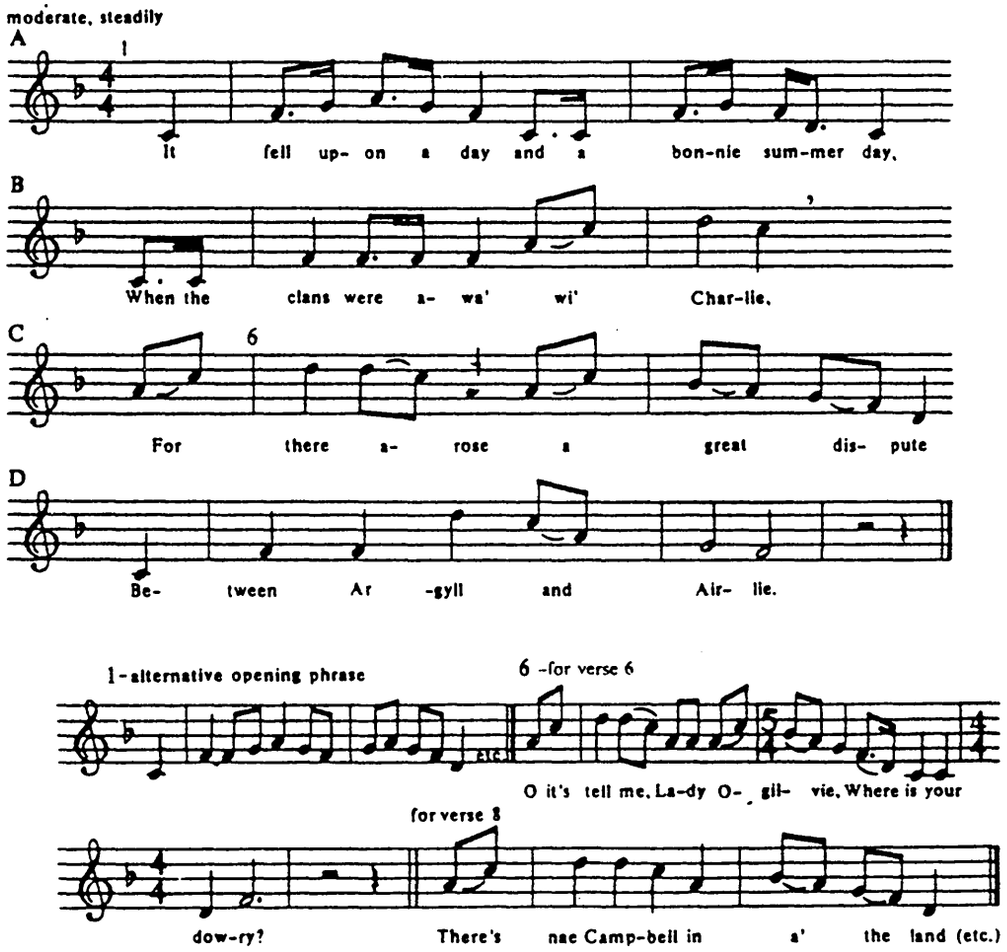
[cont'd]


IX
♩ = 44
rubato
The mil-ler he dried noo up his dam, Hy-ie-o, sae bon-nie-o;
And then they took her an hung her out to dry, And the swan it sweem sae bon-nie-o.
A
A'
There were three fid-dler-ies on their-ie way, Hy-ie-o sae bon-nie-o;
One o them took three links of her hair-ie For-ie to make some fid-dle string-ies;
A ♩ = 54
A'
The o-ther one he took her-a mid-dle fin-ger-ie, For-ie tae make some fid-dle pins;
A ♩ = 63
The o-ther one took now her-ie breast-bone
♩ = 88
A''
rit . . . .
B ♩ = 88
For ta mak a fid-dle that would play a tune its lone And the swan that sweem sae bon-nie-o.
[cont'd]


XI
A
♩ = 56
The three fid-dler-ies they went on their way,
A'
Hy-ie-o sae bon-nie-o.
A
B
Till they cam to her fa-ther's cas-tel wall, And the swan it sweem sae bon-nie-o.
XII
A
rubato
There now sits my fa-ther-ie the King
A'
Hy-ie-o, sae bon-nie-o
A
rubato
B
And 'twise-like noo my-ie moth-er-ie the queen, And the swan it sweem sae bon-nie-o.
XIII
A
Aye and there noo sits my false sis-ter Jean
A
rubato
B
ritard
Who's still noo!
Sly-ly throwed me a-gainst the stream, And the swan at sweems sae bon-nie-o.

The most common type of strophic expansion is the repetition of the internal phrases, a return to B(2) after C(3) in those stanzas featuring an incremental repetition of the essential idea normally carried in line three.[2] A fine example is Charlotte Higgins' performance of "Bonnie Hoose of Airlie" (CH 199), when the penultimate verse was sung to an expanded six phrase strophe, ABCBCD. See ex. 13.

Example 13. Charlotte Higgins, "The Bonnie Hoose of Airlie," in MacColl, pp. 90 - 91.



1 It fell upon a day and a bonnie summer day,
When the clans were awa' wi' Charlie,
For there arose a great dispute
Between Argyll and Airlie.

2 The Duke o' Montrose has ridden fast and hard,
To reach Dunkeld in the morning,
To lead in his troops by the back o' Dunkeld,
To plunder the bonnie hoose o' Airlie.

3 Lady Ogilvie she looked fae her high castle wa',
O, but she sighed sairly
To see the false Argyll and hundreds o' his men
Come to plunder the bonnie hoose o' Airlie.

4 'Come doon, come doon, Lady Ogilvie,' he said,
'Come doon and kiss me fairly.'

I wadna kiss ye, ye false Argyll
Though ye wadna leave a stannin' stane in Airlie.

5 O, I have reared seven bonnie sons,
The eighth ne'er seen his daddy;
But if I wad hae as mony ower again
They would a' gang and fecht for Charlie.

6 He took her by the middle sma',
Throwed her on the banks o' Airlie,
O, it's tell me, Lady Ogilvie,
Where is your dowry?

7 Its up and doon and doon and up, (A)*
It lies in the bowlin' green o' Airlie. (B)
For they socht it up and they socht it doon, (C)
They socht it late and early, (B)
And they found it below a bonnie balm tree (C)
That spread ower the bowlin' greens o' Airlie. (D)

8 If my guid lord had been at hame,
As this nicht he's awa' wi' Charlie,
There's nae Campbells in a' the land,
Wad have burned the bonnie hoose o' Airlie.

* The letters in parentheses indicate which line of music is used.

Another excellent example of internal phrase repetition as a means of expressing the dramatic height of the penultimate verse, marking the tension in the last act of a ballad drama, is Duncan Williamson's "Lady Margaret," verse 17, see ex. 11. Every performance of the ballad, nine recorded between 1975 and 1984, features the very same irregular expanded strophe before the final scene when the two lovers "ride merrily away." A repetition of phrases BC occurs in every variant after (3) in the penultimate strophe, carrying the angry threat of the fairy queen, the most emotive line in the story.

In conclusion, the art of narrative singing by travellers, their incorporation of irregularity in strophic forms, does not strictly follow the "logic of music," as Bronson would believe. He has written that the lyrical statement of melody opposes the movement of narrative "towards a goal" because lyrical statement is repetitive. And only by understanding the "logic of music" can the traditional ballad be fathomed. But here the point has been made that only by understanding the creative force of singers, who can respond to the needs of story-telling in song and who often do, evident from their strophic reductions and expansions in performance, can we truly come to know the ballad of tradition.

Bronson put his point of view eloquently:

> Narrative travels toward a goal, along a path where fresh objects are successively encountered, incommensurate in urgency and importance. A constantly varying pace and emotional pitch is therefore all the while affecting, without obliterating, the underlying drive to get to the end. Impose upon such disparate matter an arbitrary and relatively rigid, brief but inevitably delaying, levelling and equalizing, unit of melodic statement, repeated from start to finish . . . is a proceedure radically inimical to the needs of narrative and could not arise from them alone. The music has its own logic and the rationale of the traditional ballad can be

understood only in the light of that logic.

(Bronson, TTCB, 1959, p. xii)

But there is much more to be said about the travellers' art of oral narration than what Bronson has implied. A study of their narrative singing will reveal principles of story-telling, formal characteristics of far greater consequence in song performance than the basic "drive to get to the end."

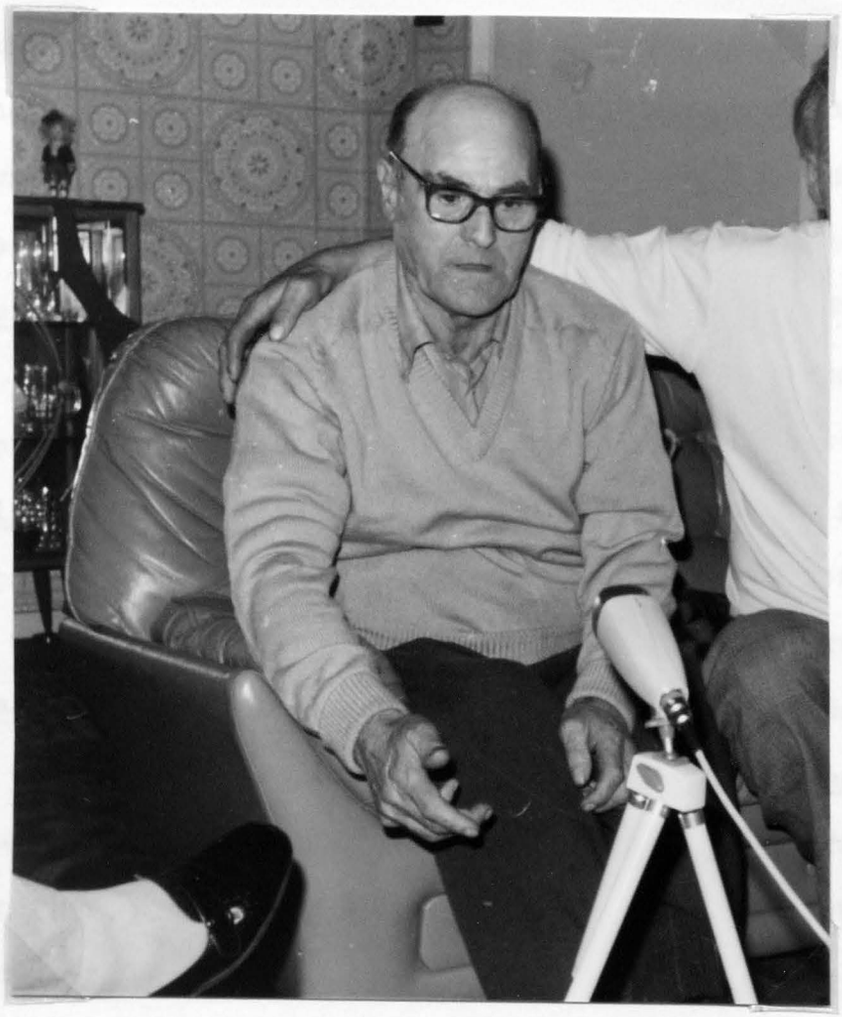


Plate 1. Johnnie Whyte sings "Swan Sweems sae Bonnie-O." Montrose, 1977.

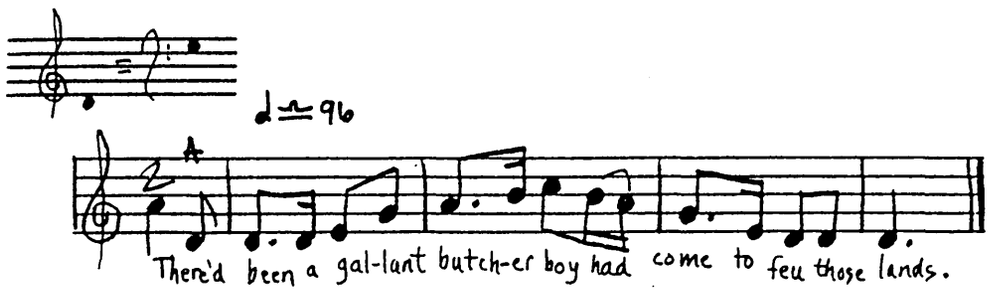
Chapter Five

STROPHIC VARIABILITY — BALLAD IMPROVISATION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the problems of understanding strophic variation in one traveller's narrative song performances which featured predominant irregularities. Several of Martha Johnstone's performances were without a standard strophe, and they call into question the very definition of "strophic song." It may be argued that a song without a standard strophe, a regularly recurring melody, a sung performance without a regular division of the text into uniform verses, is not stanzaic and hence non-strophic. According to The Shorter Oxford Dictionary: "strophe -- Gr. occasionally (after Fr.) used as = stanza."[1] However, while dictionary definitions of "strophe" or "stanza" presuppose a normal form of stanzaic poetry or strophic songs, this norm may not be applicable to one individual's performances as a product of a specific culture such as the travellers'.

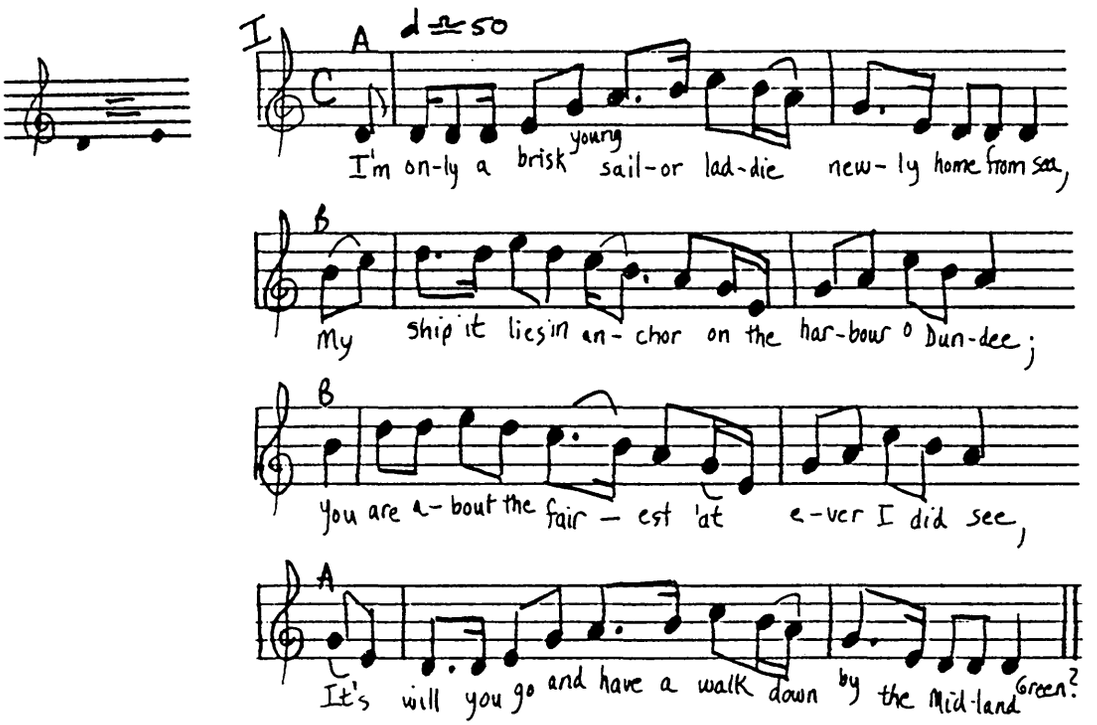
What may be observed in Martha Johnstone's narrative repertoire is a variability of verse form within some performances. "Non-strophic" would be the appropriate term for a performance sans verse structure e.g., the singing of a narrative to one phrase. Martha's performance of Laws L4, ex. 1, was a singular example within her recorded performances of a non-strophic narrative for it was sung exclusively to the A phrase of a more common ABBA tune which Martha rendered for "Midland Green," see ex. 1a.

Example 1. Martha Johnstone, "Johnstone and Gibson," 57/8; complete song.



A As he'd been riding through thon woods by speed and mighty fame,
A He saw a naked wooman and her hair bound to thye ground. [thye = the]
A It's Johnstone been feelin-hearted to all poor womankind,
A He rolled her in his jacketcoat aye and put her up behind.
A She put her fingers in her ears and gien three skriecks and cries.
A When four and twenty robbers bold had charged him for to stand:
A For can you fight says Johnstone or would you thole to run?
A I would rather run says Gibston before I would fight a man.
A For it's ten he slew and ten he lewgh and four had got away. [lewgh = lowered]
A It'd been a false-hearted woman had spored him through and through.
A It's go and tell my mother as still she cares,
A 'At her weedow-womaned son been killed — the hard'est man in Ireland.

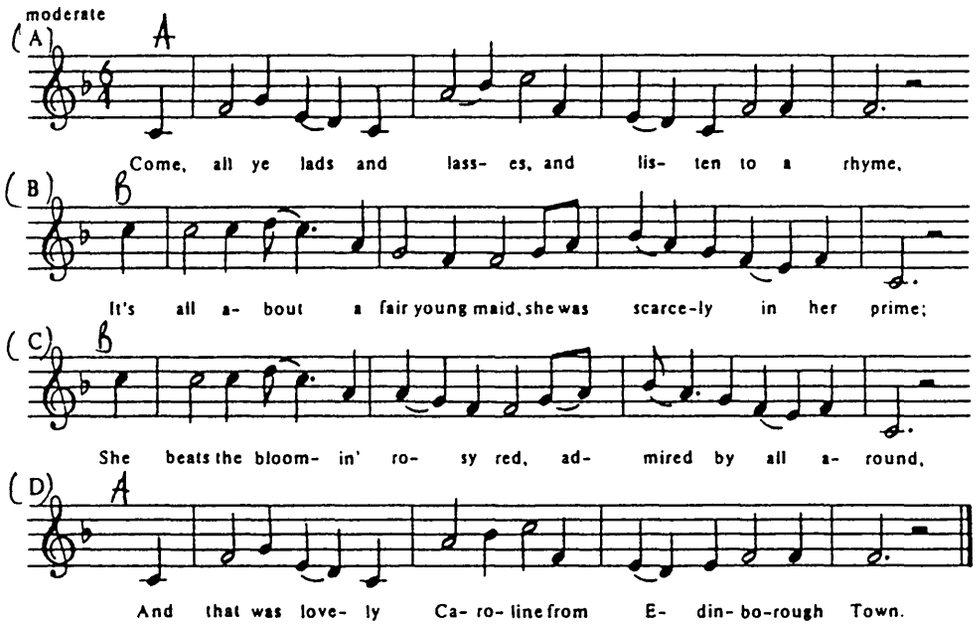
Example 1a. Martha Johnstone, "Midland Green," 55/51, first strophe only.



In the analysis of Martha Johnstone's narratives, the term "strophic variability" is apt because verse structures were definite in the greater number of instances. Stanzas were delimited by a refrain line, for example, although regularity was minimal or absent. A standard strophic form, however, was not achieved or not operative in several performances and irregularity was the rule rather than the exception in some songs.

A few other travellers' narratives, shown in MacColl's 1977 collection, also exemplified salient irregularity in strophic forms. One was John MacDonald's "Caroline of Edinburgh Town, " ex. 2. The ABBA form of I was not sung again in the performance, and the subject of the song — suicide — was probably one reason why the form of the strophes was not standardized. Suicide is regarded by travellers as a religious violation, "a sin in the eyes of God."[2] Although no specific contextual information from John was given by MacColl regarding this song, MacColl's general description of John's singing is probably true for this performance, "John MacDonald .... sang with tremendous pressure which gathered volume as the song took him over." (1977, p. 21) In a discussion of variation MacColl had written, ".... the main attention of our singers was on the story and the tune was taken for granted or allowed to go its own way." (1977, p. 19) No specific examples were given by MacColl, but this song's irregularity, a strophic variability, is a good example of a tune being "taken for granted" if I understand MacColl correctly.

Example 2. John MacDonald, "Caroline of Edinburgh Town" (Laws P27), in MacColl, p. 185.



1 Come, all ye lads and lasses, and listen to a rhyme,
It's all about a fair young maid, she was scarcely in her prime;
She beats the bloomin' rosy red, admired by all around,
And that was lovely Caroline from Edinburgh Town.

2 . . . . . .
B Young Hendry bein' a Highland lad and a-courtin' her he came,
B Through lonely fields and valleys wide, to gather the dead . . .,
A Until he came to landing far from her happy home.

3 B Some strangers they did pity her, ay, and some did on her frown (C)*
A And some did say she rued the day she left Edinburgh Town. (D)

4 B And to these woods to seek for food this girl began to roam, (B)
B And watching all these gallant ships as they went sailin' by (C)
B She gave three shouts for Henery, then plunged her body down (B)
B She lies asleep beneath the deep and the fishes watching round (C)
A Think of that fate of Caroline from Edinburgh Town. (D)

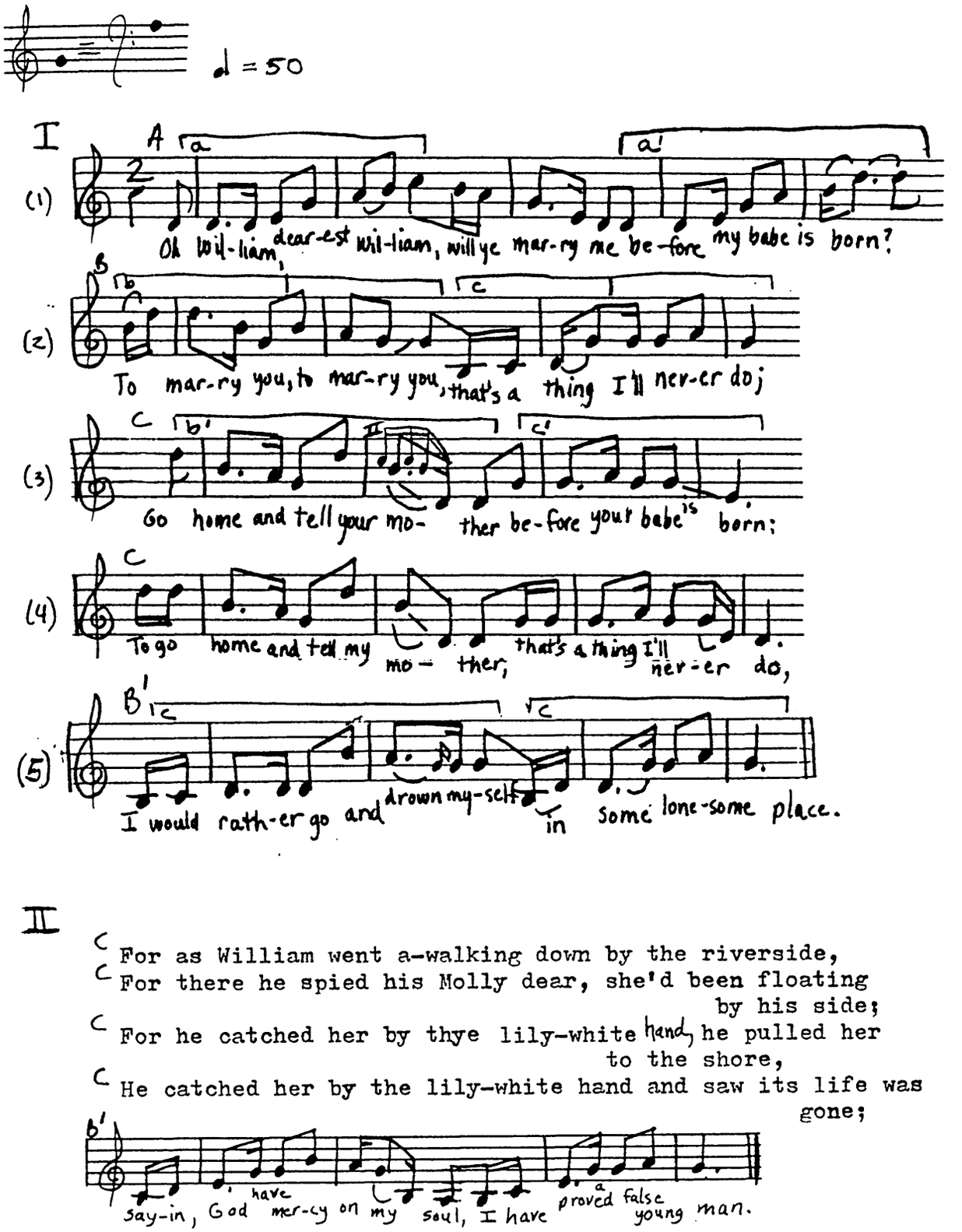
5 B Young Hendry bein' an honest lad and a-lookin' her he came (B)
B The note was in her bonnet found which she left on the shore, (C)
B Sayin' 'Cruel-hearted Henery, you'll never see me more, (B)
B I lie asleep beneath the deep and the fishes watching round.' (C)
A And that's the fate of Caroline from Edinburgh Town. (D)

* The letters in parenthesis indicate which line of music is used.

Using the refrain line as the delimiting line of stanzas in John's song, and disregarding the missed lines indication by the editor, the strophe forms were ABBA, BBABA and BBBBA (repeated). The successive phrase grouping, increasing in repetition, was a song form that occurred in one of Martha's narratives as well. It too was a suicide narrative, but with the express theme of moral shame, "Floating down the Tide" (MC 76, SH 67). In her song, as in John's, the opening phrase did not recur as the first line of any subsequent stanza — it did not recur at all. But like John's song, the stanzas were progressively more repetitious; the phrase group CCB' in I (3) (4) (5) was repeated and expanded to CCCCB' in II. The successive phrase grouping corresponded to the building up of an emotional climax — in effect, a musical interpretation of suicide from moral shame. See ex. 3.

A in this performance was the same A in the "Johnstone and Gibson" song above, and it may be noted as a common opening phrase to other performances by Martha e.g., as the first phrase of "The Task" in 1977 (see ex. 14 below) and the opening of "Banks o Airderie-O" in 1957. It was a phrase firmly fixed in her mind.

Example 3. Martha Johnstone, "Floating down the Tide," 55/42; complete song.



II

C For as William went a-walking down by the riverside,
C For there he spied his Molly dear, she'd been floating by his side;
C For he catched her by thye lily-white hand, he pulled her to the shore,
C He catched her by the lily-white hand and saw its life was gone;

Another example of stanzaic irregularity in a traveller's narrative, shown in MacColl, was the recitation of Child 76 by Charlotte Higgins. Its text was highly irregular and MacColl noted the difficulty in delimiting verses; " .... as the piece was recited sometimes as poetry and sometimes as prose, we have ended the 'verses' where pauses were made." (1977, p. 73; see ex. 4)

Example 4. Charlotte Higgins, "Lord Gregory," in MacColl, p. 73.

1 O, open the door, Lord Gregory,
O, open and let me in;
For the rain rins doon my bonnie yellow hair,
And the dew falls on your son.

2 O, open the door, Lord Gregory,
O, open and let me in.

3 O do you mind, O do you mind, Lord Gregory
When we sat on the hill together?
We exchanged the rings off one another's hand,
But I vowed that the best was mine,
Ay, I vowed that the best was mine.

4 Mine was o' guid gold,
And yours was o' silver fine.

5 O, do you mind, Lord Gregory,
When we exchanged the cloaks off one another's back,
And I vowed that the best was mine.

6 O, open the door, Lord Gregory,
O, open and let me in.
For the rain rins doon my bonnie yellow hair,
And the rain falls on your son.

7 Go 'wa', go 'wa', you ill woman,
Go 'wa', go 'wa', you ill woman.

8 He says, 'O mother dear, I dreamed a dream,
I hope it won't come true;
I dreamed that the lass of Lochinvar
Was knocking at the door for me.
Ay, knocking at the door for me.'

9 She said, 'The lass of Lochinvar
Was knocking at the door for you
More than three-quarters of an hour ago.'

10 O woe be unto you, mother,
Wae be unto you again,
And woe be unto you, mother,
That did not let her in.

11 Go saddle to me the black or the brown,
Go saddle to me the grey.
He rode and he rode and he faster than rode
Till he come to the nearest town.
And there he spied two men,
Carrying a corpse away,
And the water rinning down,
And the water rinning down.

12 'O lay down, O lay down this corpse,' he said,
'And lay them down wi' care.
You will drink a strong drink over them,
But you'll drink far stronger over me.'

13 They were both buried in the one grave,
There was a red rose grew out of one lover's grave,
And a briar out of the other.

14 They twisted and twined and better than twined,
Till a true-lover's knot they made.

I. Textual Improvisations

I.1. Three Performances of Child 7

Martha Johnstone also performed a narrative which was between prose and poetry, which was metred but not in any strict sense versified. Her recitation of Child 7, "King William," was no more regular than Charlotte's recitation above. See ex. 5.

Example 5. Martha Johnstone, "King William and Lady Margaret," spoken recitation, 75/197/A1.

1 For they did start a battle;
For she had ten bra sons and the auld father grey.
(He was grey in the hair.)
Now you have slain all my sons
And you hold him in your right hand.
(You hold the auld man in your right hand.)
But now I had ten pretty sons
And that left the one to take my part.

2 Hold on, hold on, Lady Margaret, he calls,
You can neither come nor stay.
For they had rood by the light of the moon
And rood by the brookie stream.

3 Come down, come down, Lady Margaret, he cried,
Come down and hold my steed by the head;
Till I get a drink of that clear crystal stream,
That runs by the brook of side.

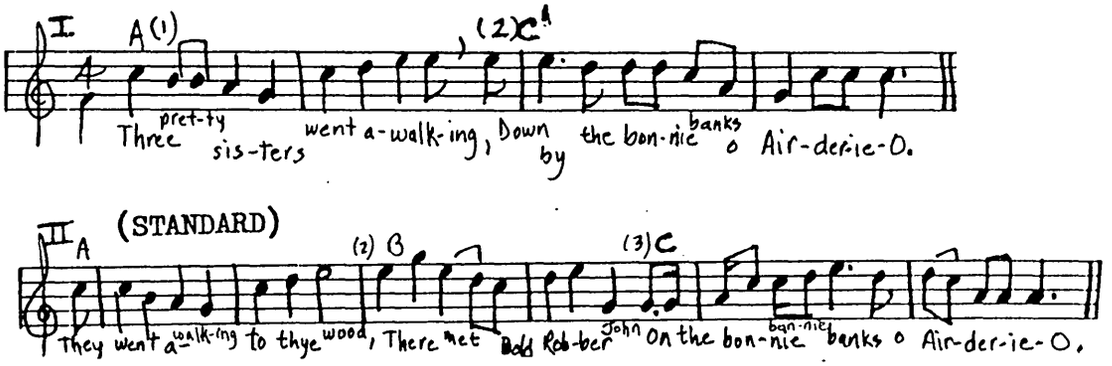
4 Hold on, hold on King William, she says,
I see your very heart's blood goin by the watery stream.
Hold on, Hold on, Lady Margaret, he cries,
It's only the gliddens of my red scarlet cloak
That runs by the brookie stream.

5 For they rood and they rood and they wee better rood,
And they rood to his own mother's door.
Oh open the door and let me in,
I'm not my lone, Mother, he says.
For they opened the door and let him in.
The one had died through the middle of the night,
And the other by the break of day.

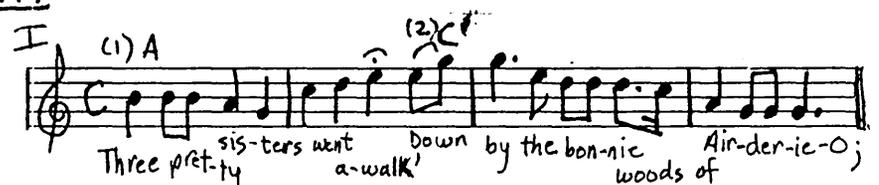
After this recitation I asked Martha, "Could you sing it," She was willing, "Well, I would try . . . " but was concerned that she should "spoil my record." (75/197/A1) I assured her she wouldn't and after a long pause she sang, ex. 6. The text was the same as the recitation, with slight differences e.g., omission of the "opening of the door" motif, two lines in vs. five of the recitation. The song was, however, clearly improvised — provided on request and evidently formulated on the spur of the moment. It was not sung to a standard strophe, but to three variable phrases, A, B and C which were part of two specific, though fluid, melodic ideas, the "Airdrie melody," see ex. 6; and "MacPherson's Farewell." All the phrases can be found in performances of Martha's "Airdrie" narrative (CH 14) or they can be analyzed as expanded motives, or re-combined motives, from the "Airdrie" phrases or the "MacPherson" tune Martha used for "King William" in 1957, see ex. 7.

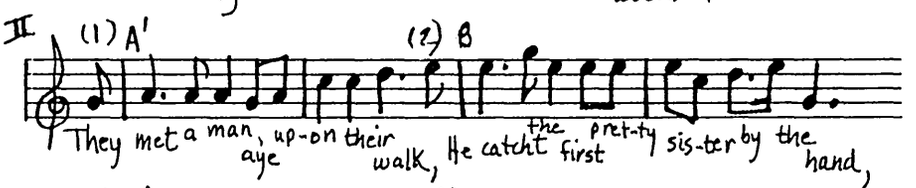
Example 6. Martha Johnstone, "Banks o Airderie-O," improvisatory opening strophes of three performances, 1967 - 1978; showing the variable "Airdrie" melodic idea.

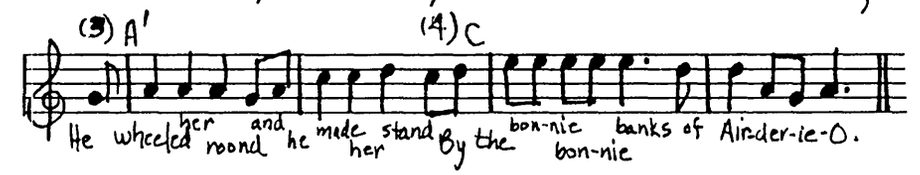
1967



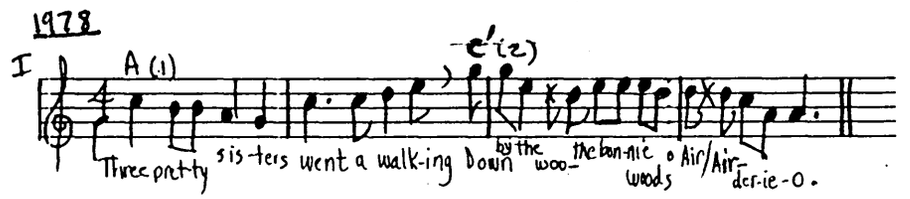
1977

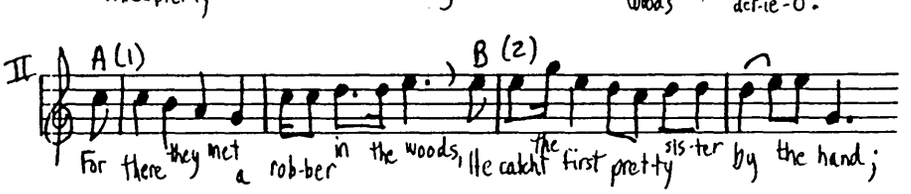


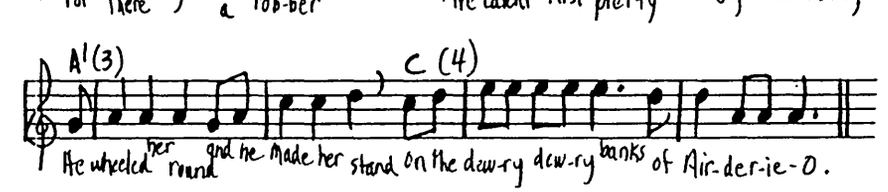




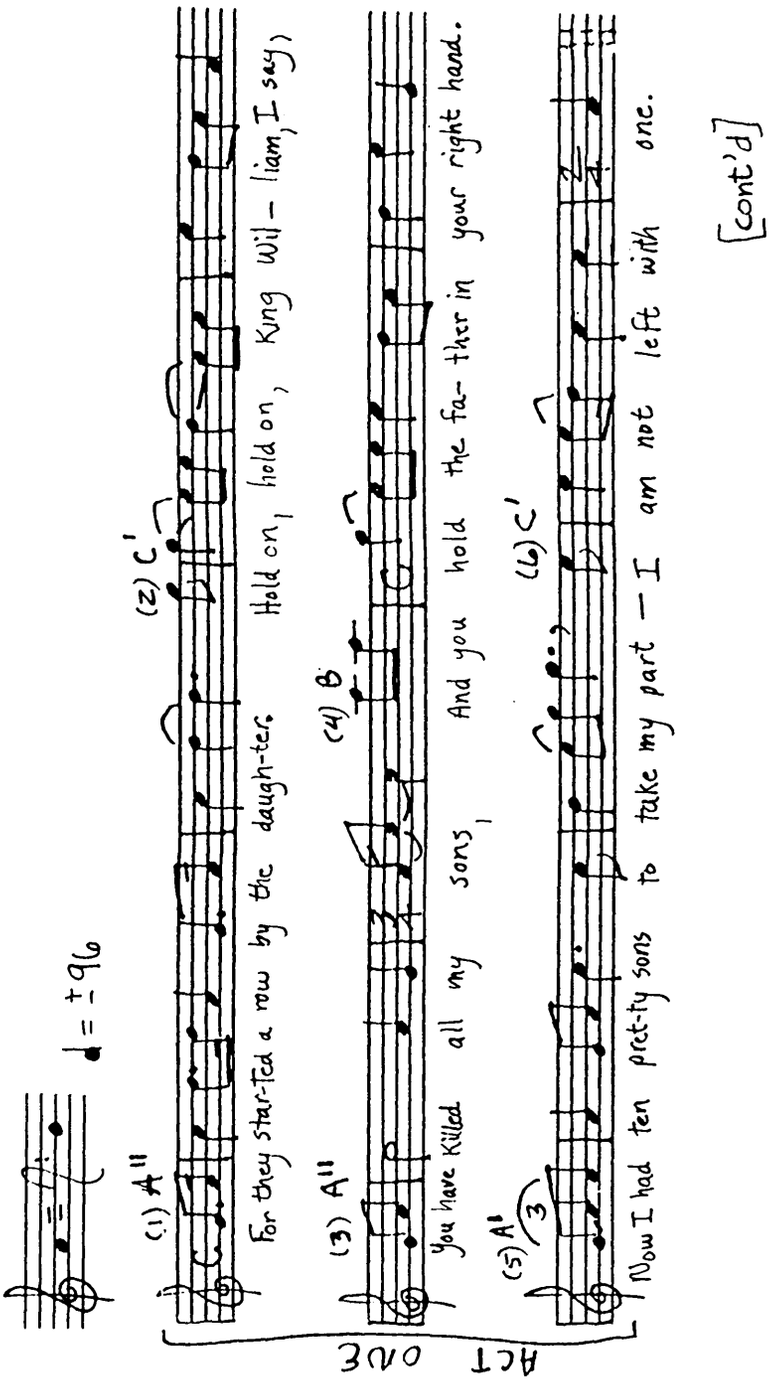
1978

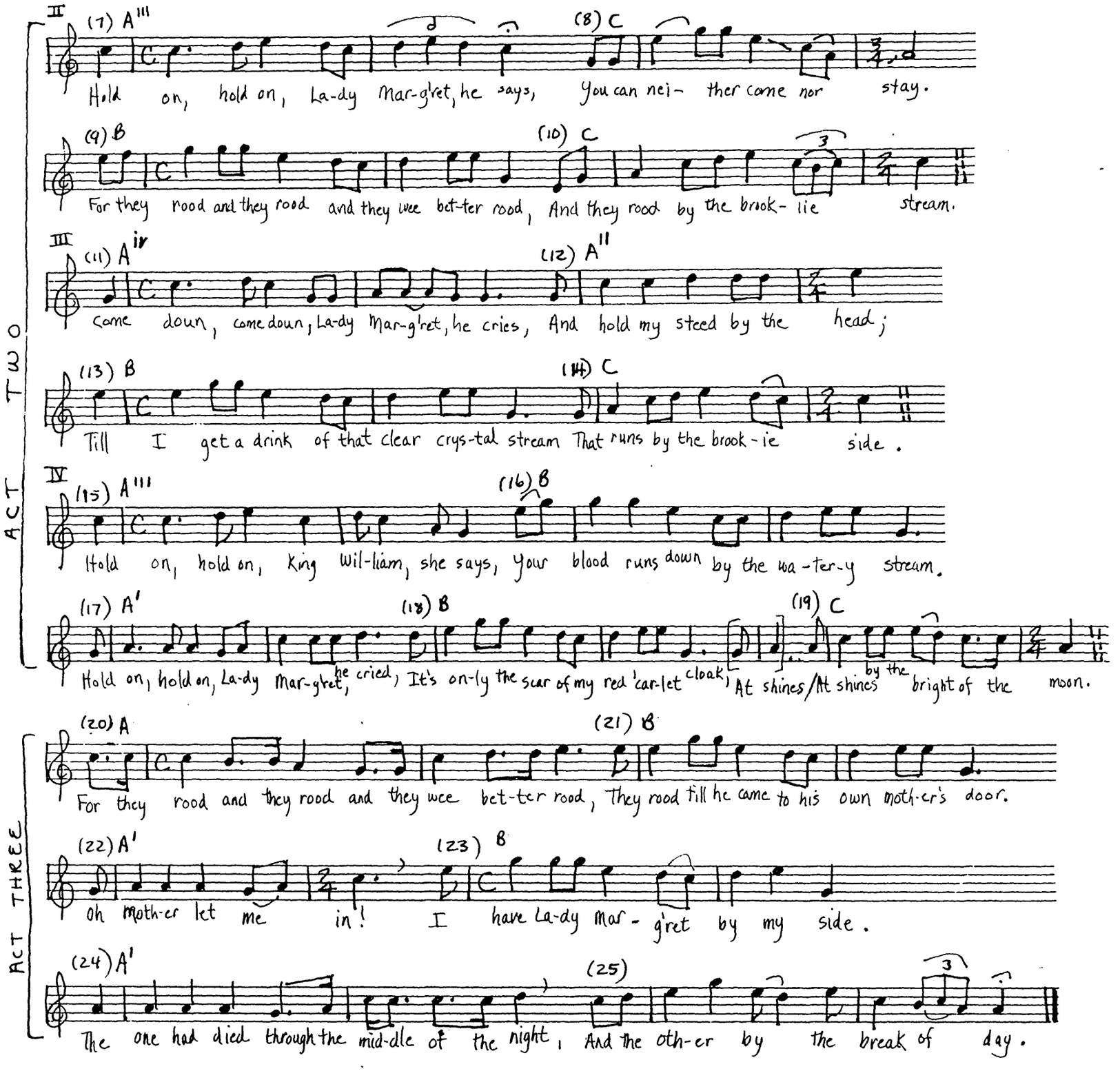






Example 6a. Martha Johnstone, "King William and Lady Margaret," sung variant, 75/197/A2. Phrases are numbered consecutively from beginning to end. The three parts of the drama are labeled as "Acts." Analysis of the phrases corresponds to the "Airdrie" melodic idea. CS




ACT TWO
II
(7) A'''
(8) C
Hold on, hold on, La-dy Mar-g'ret, he says, You can nei- ther come nor stay.
(9) B
(10) C
For they rood and they rood and they wee bet-ter rood, And they rood by the brook- lie stream.
III
(11) A''
(12) A''
come doun, come doun, La-dy Mar-g'ret, he cries, And hold my steed by the head;
(13) B
(14) C
Till I get a drink of that clear crys-tal stream That runs by the brook-ie side.
IV
(15) A'''
(16) B
Hold on, hold on, King Wil-liam, she says, your blood runs down by the wa-ter-y stream.
(17) A'
(18) B
(19) C
Hold on, hold on, La-dy Mar-g'ret, he cried, It's on-ly the scar of my red 'car-let cloak, At shines/At shines by the bright of the moon.
ACT THREE
(20) A
(21) B
For they rood and they rood and they wee bet-ter rood, They rood till he came to his own moth-er's door.
(22) A'
(23) B
Oh moth-er let me in! I have La-dy Mar-g'ret by my side.
(24) A'
(25)
The one had died through the mid-dle of the night, And the oth-er by the break of day.

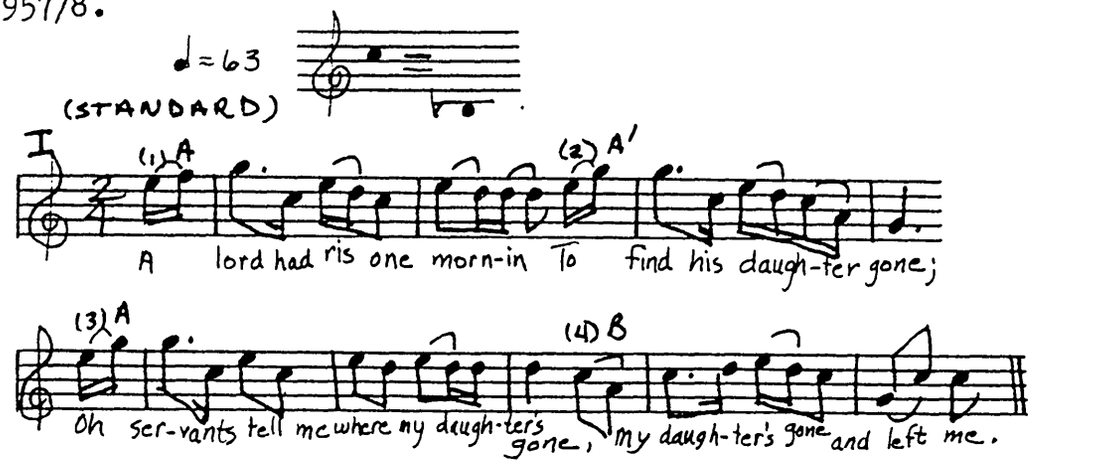
In 1957 Martha sang the same narrative to a fluid standard strophe, the tune usually associated with the text of "MacPherson's Farewell" (MC 88). And after this performance in 1957 Hamish Henderson had asked Martha,

H — When did you first hear it, do ye mind?
M — Oh, that was my great-grandfather again!
H — Was it?
M — Yes.
H — And that was his tune too, was it?
M — Well, it was his tune at that time, ye see.
H — Aye.
M — Of course, I havena, ye see, they havena the same tunes now as what they had those days.
H — Hmm-mm.
M — Ye see, it's different now. They've all the quick sort o stuff.
H — I, I know. But, but, that was the tune he sang it to?
M — Yes. That was the tune.

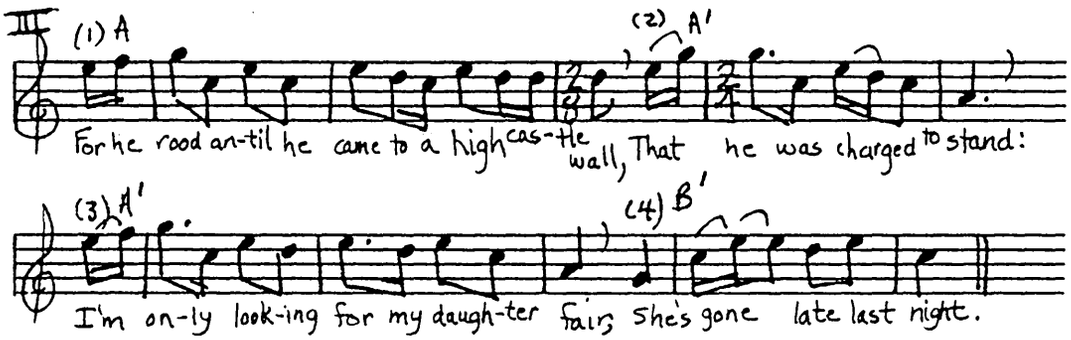
(57/8)

The text of the 1957 "King William" was distinctly different from the latter song, with half of the total song comprised of Lady Margaret's father angrily pursuing his daughter the morning after she had eloped with William. In 1957 this part of the story was omitted entirely. Why? Had the span of eighteen years affected Martha's memory — had she not sung the narrative for eighteen years? Or did she no longer remember the full story? And was this also the case with the tune? Had she forgotten the tune?

Example 7 . Martha Johnstone, "King William and Lady Margaret," 1957/8.

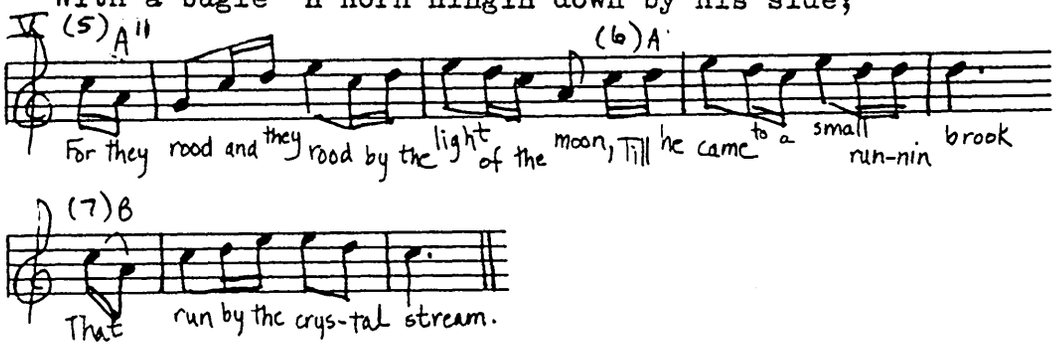


2 She's gone away with William last night,
She's gone far away;
Oh saddle ta me my white milk steed
That I may go in search.



4 A Hold on, hold on, lord, he says,
A' I'll fetch your daughter fair.
A For King William and his daughter fair cam there —
A Hold on, hold on, King William, she cries,
A' Your sword's a fearful swor';
A A husband, a husband I may well get again,
B But a father I'll never get more.

5 A For he mounted her ond a white milk steed,
A' And hisself on a dapple grey;
A For they two lovers cam riding away
A With a bugle 'n horn hingin down by his side;

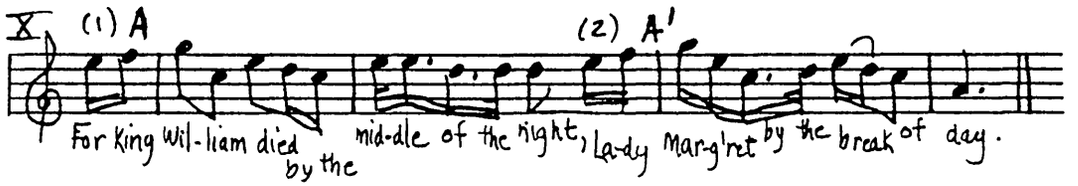


6 Come down, come down, Lady Margaret, he cried,
An hold my sted be the head;
Till I get a drink of that clear crystal stream
That runs by the small burnside.

7 A Hold on, hold on, King Williams, she cried,
A' I see your very heart's blood runnin down by the water stream;
A It's a lie, a lie, Lady Margaret, I say;
A It's only the glow of my red scarlet clark
B That runs by the water stream.

8 For he mounted her on the white-milk steed
And hisself on a dapple grey;
For they two lovers cam riding away
And they rood by the light of the moon.

9 A And they rood and they rood and they wee better rood
A' Till he came to his own mother's door;
A♭ Sayin, Mother, open the door and let me in,
B It's only your own good son.



I never questioned Martha directly about her memory of old songs, although I did discuss with her her ideas about old songs, see chapter two. Martha, herself, offered comments about remembering songs or not being able to remember songs. She did this often enough to warrant a diversion at this point in our study of her improvisations. Memory is a very important issue because if we presume the singer was forgetful, then our thesis about the cognition and volition of variation is seriously undermined. (See section II, chapter three.) Martha distinguished carefully between those songs she could remember accurately and those she knew she couldn't. If she "couldna mind the song," then no amount of persuasion from a fieldworker could induce her to say "just a single verse o it maybe." (MJ and HH, 57/8) If Martha had performed a song as completely as she could have, according to her knowledge of it up to that point in time, and she knew there was very likely more of the song — that she had heard or heard about — then she would always report the fragmentary nature of her version, "That's all that I ken o it," or "It's only a wee bit" (after singing a version of Child 278, 55/51; and her version of MC 99, 55/48). Martha's awarenessof the part played by her memory in performance assists our understanding of her performances, for we do not need to presume she ever forgot part of a song — she would tell us this as a fact. And we can deduce from this that whenever she did not report on a missing or forgotten part, the song she performed was the song she knew and intended to perform in just the way she performed it — there was nothing accidental or random in her singing activity. When she made mistakes she never hesitated to

correct them: i.e., she did not continue as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. It was important to her to get a performance right.

Thus, in the case of the 1975 "King William," we should understand the singer's different interpretation of the narrative story as fully intentional; the father did not have a part in the 1975 song because it was not important or necessary to the story as Martha wanted to express it on that occasion. The differences in the two texts of the ballad, in 1957 and 1975, would be defined by Buchan as a shift towards drama in the later performance, a shift away from action in Buchan's theoretical spectrum —

> At one end [of the spectrum] are ballads which tell their stories primarily through dramatic confrontation of characters; at the other, stand ballads which tell stories with much greater stress on events of narrative action.
>
> (1972, p. 134)

The text in 1975, by contrast to the earlier one, was more dramatic. Both the recitation and the sung performance were identical in their tripartite textual structures: the scene with the lovers at the stream was framed by their encounters with their respective mothers, Lady Margaret's at the start (labeled "Act One" in ex. 6) and King William's at the end (labeled "Act Three").

It would not be wrong to conclude that Martha had a more pronounced emotional attitude towards the story in 1975 than she had in 1957. After the performance I had asked Martha,

L — What is the story?

M — W-w-w-wounded, wounded.

L — Aha.

M — Ken, at one time they used swords 'n that, jaggin one another. [Laughs.]

L — Yes, yes.

M — See. Terrible.

L — Aha.

(75/197/A1)

Such a response is evidence of the singer's emotional attitude towards the story. In relation to the singer's attitude towards the text, the variability of the song may be understood more clearly. Martha might have purposely sung the story of "King William" in 1975 to variable phrases so that she could communicate the feeling of the story to her listener — I was, after all, a new acquaintance to her, not only a non-traveller, but an American as well. Perhaps Martha wanted to respond most of all to the impulse of the story and rather than sing a more static tune, she sang variable phrases — not unlike the performances of "rimur" in Iceland, Norse epic song:

> The text is carried by special melodic formulas which stress the quality of the language and give emotion to the account. The epic song's succession of narrative melodic formulas does not lead to the formation of formalised tunes, structures which would make the text sequence dependent upon a musical idea, but intoning of the narrative serves to enrich the text with the emotional content of music. .... They [the melodic formulas] are variable: their form changing in accordance with the impulse of the story and in keeping with the singer's attitude to the story's content.
>
> (Thorkild Knudsen, 1967/1, p. 2)

I.2. Three Performances of Child 10

Martha's word 'terrible,' used to describe the story of "King William" in 1975, was also used to describe an incident in another narrative she had sung prior to "King William" during that recording session. The narrative was "Breastbone," a version of Child 10. After singing Martha gave a synopsis of the story,

M — It was an old man that was working on the ecstate, you see! At the castle. .... And he went out taen a stroll down by the damn and he found this bone. And he says to hissel, 'I'll take this home and make a harp for masel,' you see. And this is what the harp said, 'I'll sing a song all alone.' You see it sung to the sister Ann.

L — Aha.

M — That's terrible, eh?

L — The harp sang the song alone — is that it?

M — It sung itsel, you see, the harp.

L — Aha.

M — The bone just.

L — Aye, aye. But she'd been pushed in the river?

M — Oh yes. You see, she was jealous o her sister — she was bonnie you see!

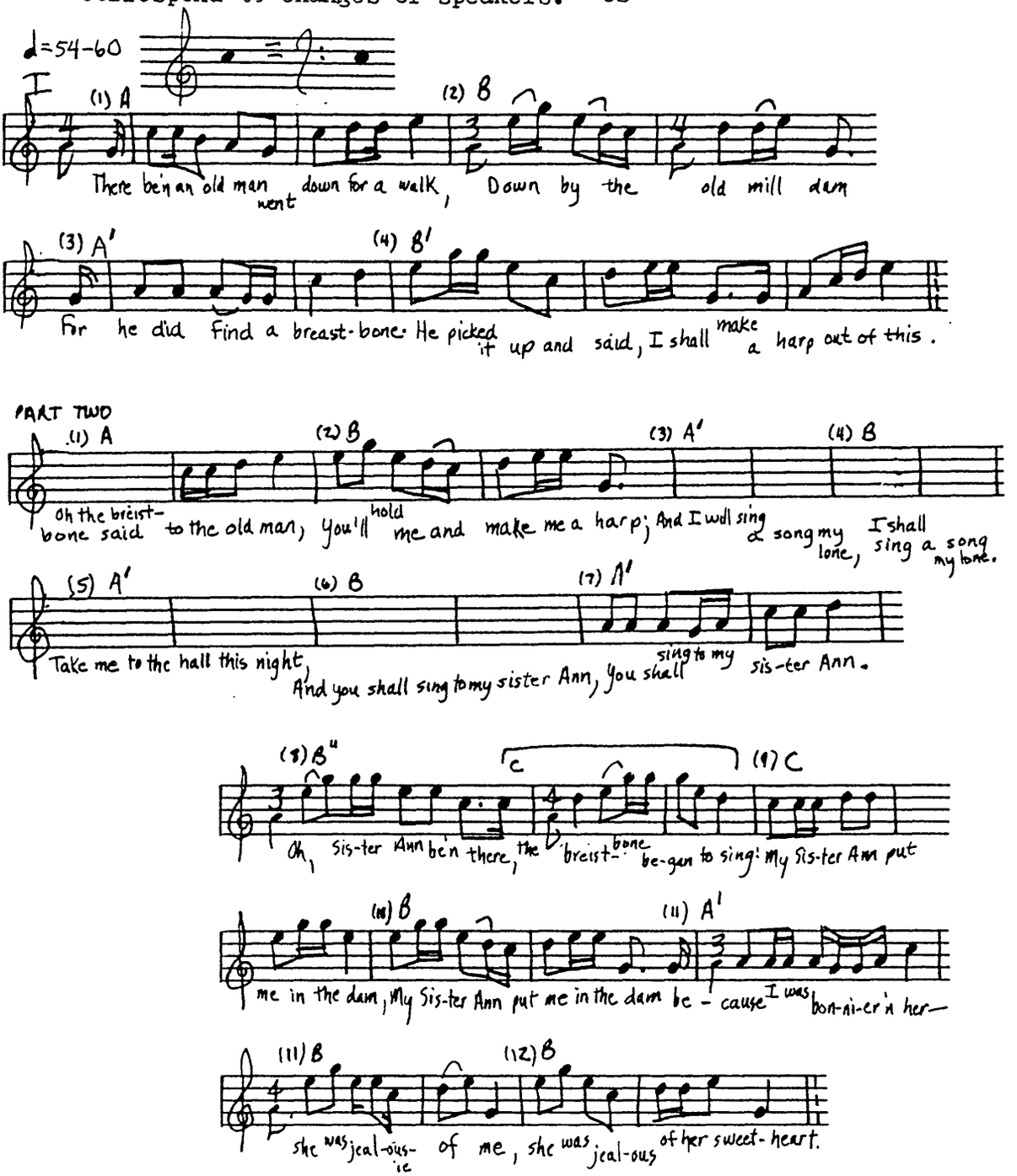
L — Aha.

M — And then she was frightened for her sweetheart. That was it.

(75/196/B1)

The text of the performance before this discussion was very emotive, a highly charged argument between two sisters. See ex. 8. It is interesting that this very emotive performance was <u>also</u> sung to variable phrases, two of the same variable phrases Martha used to deliver "King William," A and B of the "Airdrie" melody; see ex. 9, chapter 4, and discussed below, II.2. The two narratives, "Breastbone" and "King William," had been separated by performances of three other songs sung to distinctly different standard strophes during this recording session, and there may have been some significance in the fact that both the ballads were sung to the same variable melody; but I did not discuss this with Martha. "King William" was not recorded again but "Breastbone" was performed on two different occasions in 1977 and 1978, when the song was again clearly improvised — as it had been in 1975.

Example 8. Martha Johnstone, Breastbone," 75/196/B1. Phrases numbered consecutively within parts of the music. Indentations correspond to changes of speakers. CS



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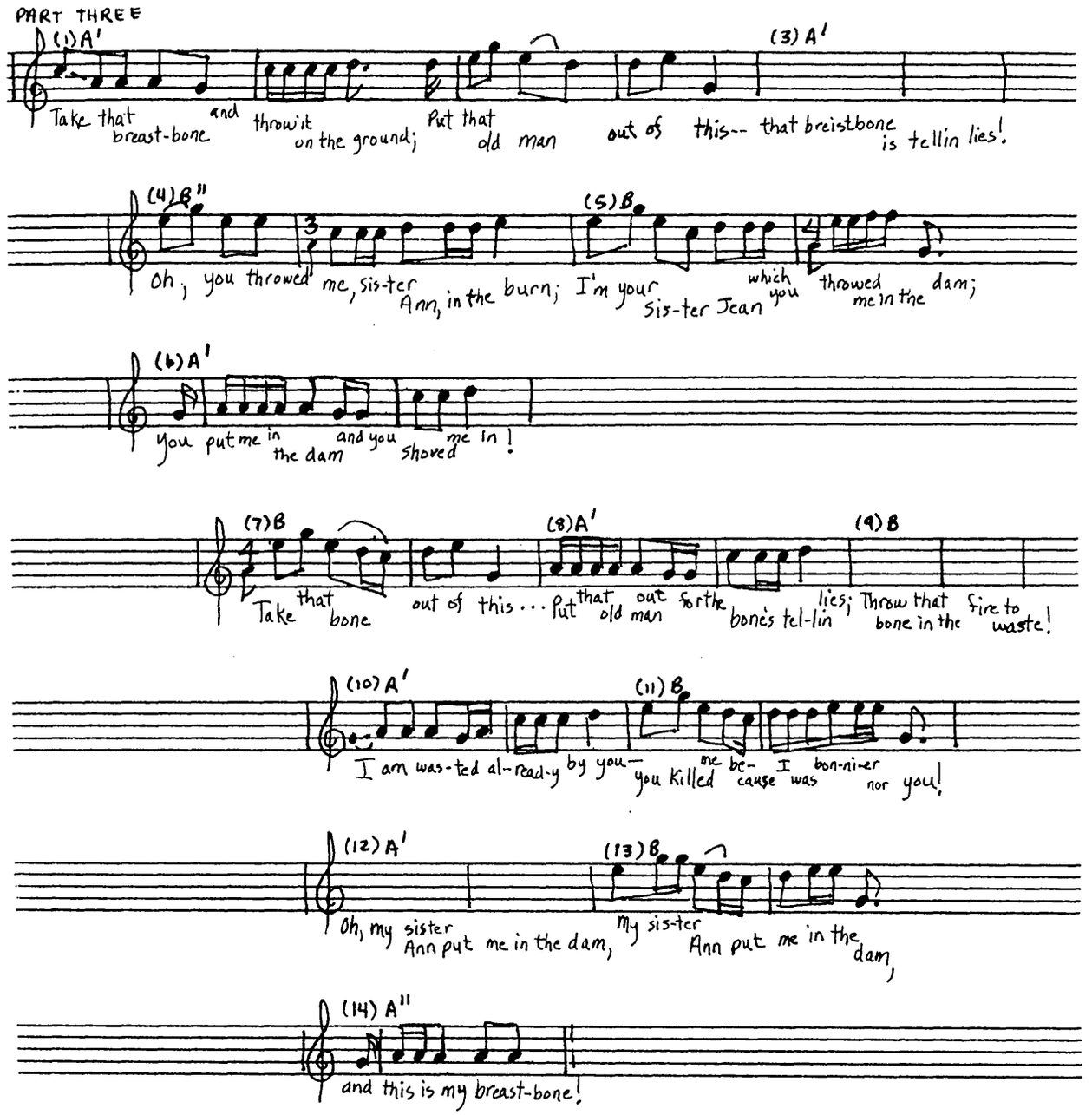
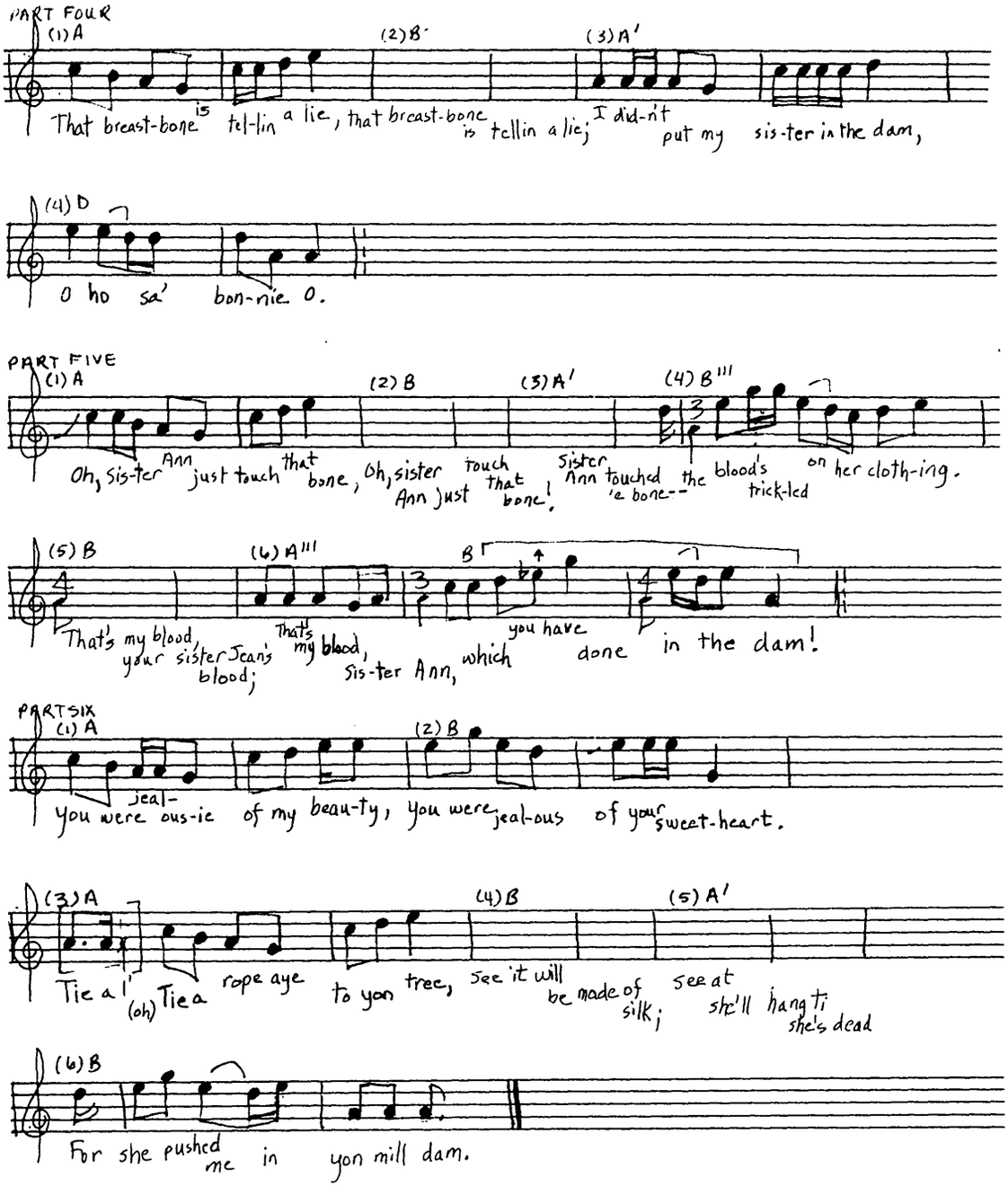

PART THREE
(1) A'
Take that breast-bone and throw it on the ground; Put that old man out of this-- that breistbone is tellin lies!
(3) A'
(4) B''
Oh, you throwed me, sis-ter Ann, in the burn; I'm your sis-ter Jean which you throwed me in the dam;
(5) B
(6) A'
You put me in the dam and you shoved me in!
(7) B
Take that bone out of this... Put that old man out for the bone's tel-lin lies; Throw that bone in the fire to waste!
(8) A'
(9) B
(10) A'
I am was-ted al-read-y by you— you killed me be-cause I was bon-ni-er nor you!
(11) B
(12) A'
Oh, my sister Ann put me in the dam,
(13) B
My sis-ter Ann put me in the dam,
(14) A''
and this is my breast-bone!

[cont'd]

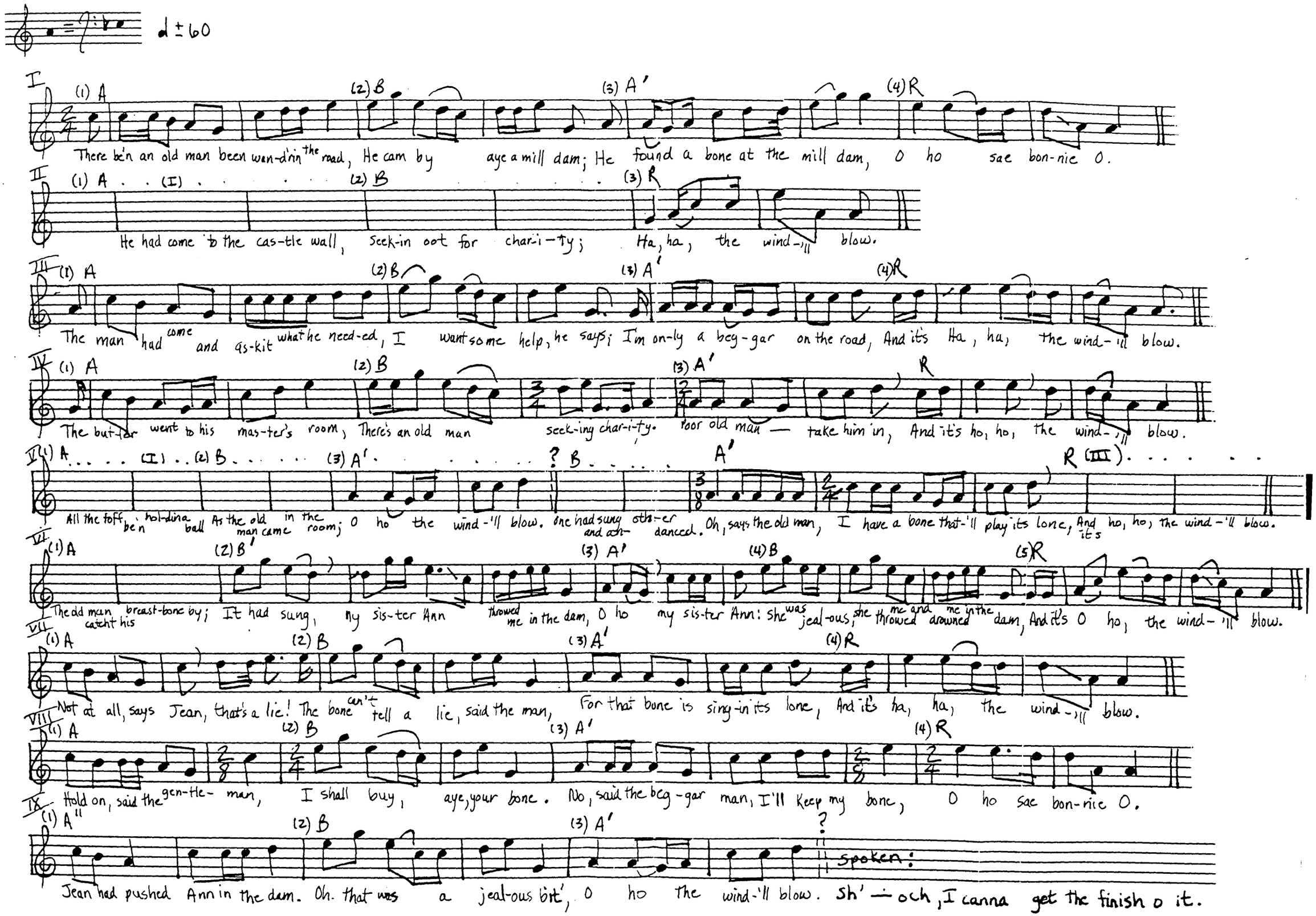

PART FOUR
(1) A
(2) B'
(3) A'
That breast-bone is tel-lin a lie, that breast-bone is tellin a lie; I did-n't put my sis-ter in the dam,
(4) D
O ho sa' bon-nie O.
PART FIVE
(1) A
(2) B
(3) A'
(4) B'''
Oh, sis-ter Ann just touch that bone, Oh, sister touch that bone! Sister Ann touched the blood's on her cloth-ing.
Ann just 'e bone-- trick-led
(5) B
(6) A'''
B
That's my blood, your sister Jean's blood; That's my blood, Sis-ter Ann, which you have done in the dam!
PART SIX
(1) A
(2) B
you were jeal- ous-ie of my beau-ty, you were jeal-ous of your sweet-heart.
(3) A
(4) B
(5) A'
Tie a' (oh) Tie a rope aye to yon tree, See it will be made of silk; See at she'll hang ti she's dead
(6) B
For she pushed me in yon mill dam.

The beginning and end of "Breastbone" in 1975 were sung to the same four phrases, ABA'B. The middle of the song was less strophic than the more definite quadriphrasal beginning and end. Between the first four and last four phrases, the music was almost exclusively alternation of two phrases, A' and B. When A returned a song "part" can be delineated — labeled in the transcription. These "parts" may be tendencies towards strophic organization, but this may be trying to explain too much. The interior of the song was characterized by irregular line construction, a high incidence of line repeats and enjambement. The text was very dramatic. The looseness of strophic organization in the middle of the song conformed to the emotionality of the argument between the two sisters with the music's extended phrases, irregular structuring of "parts" and a fluctuating metre. The singer's interpretation of the story was one good reason why she sang the song the way she did in 1975.

But other factors might have been responsible for the loosely formed, improvisatory, middle of the song. Could Martha have become more aware of her one listener during the singing, my presence causing her to increase the emotionality of the text? Or perhaps Martha's concentration on a fixed sequence of phrases was adversely affected by my presence — I was a non-traveller and a relative stranger **which might have distracted her.**

The 1977 performance of "Breastbone." This second variant of the ballad recorded from Martha was characterized by regularity, the addition of eight refrain phrases and ten refrain lines, adopted from "The Task" (CH 2), sung previously during the same session.

Example 9. Martha Johnstone, "The Breastbone," 77/145/B7.



A standard strophe, the "Airdrie" quadriphrasal variant, ABA'C, was sung as I and recurred as III, IV, VII and VIII. II was a reduced strophe, the "Airdrie" triphrasal strophe.

The irregularities in strophes V and VI (3), with the words of the "wind-'ll blow" refrain being sung to the music of (3) rather than to the music of the refrain phrase (4) as established in I, upset the strophic pattern. These irregularities were indicative of Martha's poor concentration on the narrative while she performed it for her traveller audience. Three lines before the end of the song the two sisters' names were mixed up. This was the only performance out of the fifty songs I recorded from Martha that was not completed in song, "Och, I canna get the finish o it." (MJ, 77/145/B7)

Martha's own comments are supportive of my describing this performance as an "unsuccessful variant" of "Breastbone." Before singing she'd complained, "I forget, ye ken, you loss some," after I'd told her twice, "I'd like to hear 'Breastbone' again." (77/145/B7) After the performance she remarked twice, "I had a good wee song there I was going to sing .... but I canna mind it." (77/145/B8) Martha had been mentally preoccupied with trying to recall the fairy abduction song, "Oh Nancy" (on three other occasions sung to the AB phrases of "Midland Green," ex. 1a), which she had begun performing earlier in this session and had been interrupted such that she lost her train of thought. The mental preoccupation with "Oh Nancy" had likewise affected adversely the previously sung narrative, "The Task" (see ex. 11 below and discussion). Her first priority was to sing the short fairy song, but she did not want to offend her traveller visitors and me who were requesting other songs, so she sang in spite of her frustration at not being able to recall

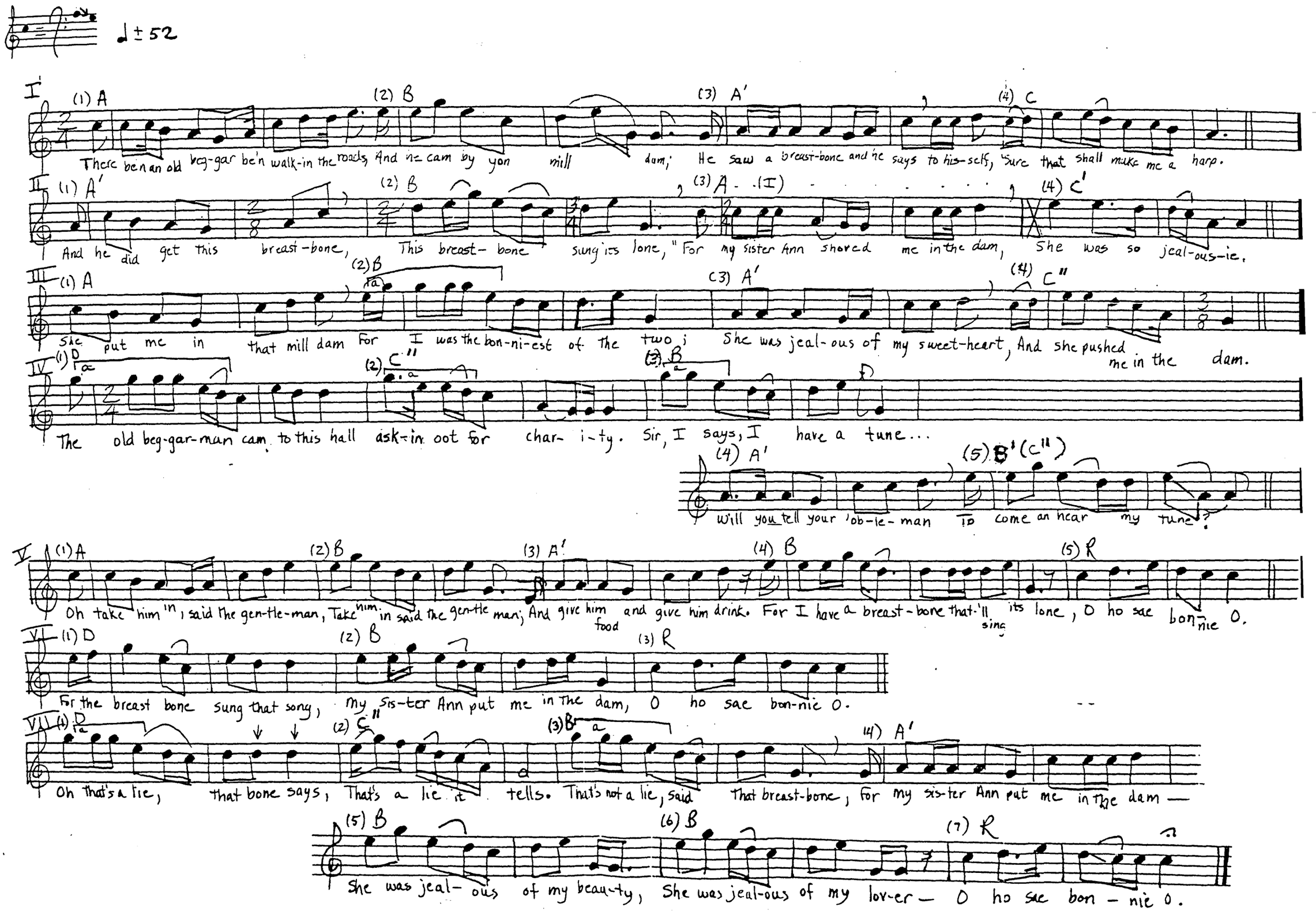
"Oh Nancy."

The 1978 performance of "Breastbone." The third performance of this narrative was given for me alone, but it was unlike either of the other two variants in its added refrain, "O ho sae bonnie O," for the last half of the song; the refrain provided an element of regularity but no regular strophe form was established in the song, even when the refrain had been established at V. VI was a short three phrase strophe and the following, final, strophe was expanded to seven phrases (if the refrain delimits the end of strophes). See ex. 10.

The first three strophes of this performance were similar in (1), (2) and (3) to the other performances of the narrative. C and C', (4) in I and II, of 1978 did not carry refrain lines, but they can be identified as the final motive of the "Airdrie" refrain phrase.

In the 1978 "Breastbone," three refrain phrases from other songs were incorporated. The fourth phrase of III in 1978 was not a textual refrain, but its music was the refrain usually sung in "The Beggarman came ower the Lea" (CH 279).[3] This phrase, C'', is also sung as part of "MacPherson's Farewell" (MC 88). Neither one of these songs were recorded from Martha, but she had made exclusive use of two phrases of the MacPherson tune for the 1957 performance of "King William," ex. 7 above. The refrain phrase of "Airdrie" was used to end Martha's strophes' I, II III and IV in this variant of "Breastbone;" while strophes V, VI and VII were ended with a different refrain phrase, the one she ordinarily sang for "The Golden Vanity" (see ex. 9, chapter three).

Example 10. Martha Johnstone, "The Breastbone," 78/109/A2. CS



In addition to the variable refrain of the 1978 "Breastbone," there is a very obvious borrowing from Child 279 in strophes IV and VI, phrases F and E', see ex. 10. How do we understand these phrases? Are they deviants, not really belonging in this song? Was Martha mistaken in singing them? Was she associating the itinerant in "Breastbone" with the "beggarman" in that other narrative?[4] Was she wrong to do this? How is this variety of musical material in one performance to be interpreted?

There are several possible explanations. The simplest is that she forgot the tune of the song and sang the first thing that entered her mind. Mixing songs is understandable when two different narratives share similar motifs or when melodic phrases in one tune are similar to phrases or motives in another tune. Johnnie Whyte noticed the mixing of tunes and songs when I played this recording of Martha's for him, but he did not disapprove — probably because the practice was traditional among the old travellers — see discussion below.

Another explanation of the performance, then, is that Martha was borrowing phrases from other songs because she thought it was perfectly acceptable, according to her idea of singing and her experience. And Lord noted in his study of Yugoslav guslars that "usefulness in [oral] composition carries no implication of opprobrium. Quite the contrary." (1960, p. 65)

But in this instance was Martha singing a tune or even trying to? Perhaps she simply didn't know the song (a third interpretation of her performance) and she was inventing, improvising, making it up as she sang it. The evidence to the contrary is in her testimony

following the 1978 variant. Martha stated quite positively that she did know the song — had learned it — although she had only heard it a few times in her childhood and only from her great-grandfather.

L — And did you hear it from anybody else?
M — Never heard it fae nobody else.
L — Aha.
M — I was awfa quick at pickin up.
L — Aha. ....
M — I just pickit that up from my great-grandfather.
L — And how many times do you think you heard it from him?
M — Oh well, a few times — which I learned, ye ken.
(78/109/A3)

A fourth explanation of the performance is that Martha was not singing <u>any</u> tune. Instead of our thinking that Martha sang two or three different refrains and borrowed music belonging to three different songs, perhaps we could think of her "Breastbone" performance as <u>a ballad melody</u> — a "fluid combination of variable melodic ideas" or the "loose combination of a narrative formula followed by an ending formula" — similar in form to those ballad melodies sung by Dane Sidsel Jensdatter for Evald Tang Kristensen.[4] In his article, "On the Nature of Ballad Tunes," Thorkild Knudsen realized the essential difference between static song tunes and the music actually sung by a ballad singer:

> .... the Norse ballad's success of verses with several lines and appurtenant refrain or burden has always been tied to a concept of the tune as a meaningful melodic whole, each part of which fulfills a specific function in the structure of the whole. This interpretation can be supported by such evidence as the frequency of new words composed to old ballad tunes. Furthermore, it is plain that all editions of Norse ballad melodies contain numerous examples that can be considered solidly constructed melodic entities.

> However, a deeper examination of the vast bulk of material available will reveal a different pattern: the association of a ballad text with a set tune is not typical. On the contrary, true ballad melodies proceed as more or less fluid combinations of variable melodic ideas which can be called intonations. To be sure, some independent musical pieces show a preferred sequence of intonations and are clearly models for groups within the material. But it is even more noteworthy that the variable ideas appear as melodic building units in many different traditional pieces.
>
> 36 of Sidsel Jensdatter's 70 melodies lend themselves to interpretation as loose combinations of narrative formulas and ending formulas. ....
>
> (1967/1, pp. 2, 3 and 5)

The term "intonation," used by Knudsen in the above passage was defined in his introduction to volume eleven of Danmarks gamle Folkeviser, "Ballad melodies are built up of intonations: traditional melodic and rhythmic figures or phrases, vocal or instrumental in character. .... The intonations .... are variable." (1976, p. 50) My identification of phrases in the musical analyses of ballad performances are equivalent to Knudsen's "intonations." He wrote that, "the same intonation can be found in many different connections and be used in ever new situations." (1976, Idem.) The concept of "intonation-insert" is particularly helpful in understanding Martha's strophic variants, how one melody can be composed of different strophe sizes as well as of different combinations of variable phrases or motives, " .... melodies can be regarded as an indeterminate quantity of intonations without fixed mutual functions." (Knudsen, 1976, p. 51)

Comprehending the variable melodic idea or variable phrases within a single performance by an individual helps clarify the idea of a "variable text." There is not necessarily a single fixed text of the "Breastbone" which Martha should have been trying to recover.

Just as the melody of the ballad was immanently variable, so was the specific textual composition. "Text" is not an inappropriate term, however; for words, phrases and plot were certainly imprinted, had been imprinted on her memory. She had "learned" the ballad from her great-grandfather. But Martha could interpret the essentially unchanging story (cf. Lord, 1960, p. 105 and Buchan, 1972, p. 163) differently. Thus in 1975, Martha's account of the story was highly dramatic, with both sisters harping at each other, a dialogue of altercation. The emphasis in the two latter performances was much different, with the much bigger part played by the beggarman and his activities in the story. There was a shift away from drama towards narrative action, opposite to the shift in the variants of "King William," the performances in 1957 and 1975.

II. Musical Improvisations of Fixed-Text Narratives

In this second part of my study of improvised narratives by Martha Johnstone, I will focus on two ballads which were clearly memorized texts -- Child 2 and Child 106. These narratives are in a different analytical category from the two presented in the first part of the chapter, Child 7 and Child 10. "Breastbone" and "King William" featured variable texts and it was not difficult to understand how melodic variability served the singer's different interpretations of an "essential story." The function of melodic variability in narratives which had fixed, memorized, texts is perhaps more difficult to explain.

II.1. The Improvisatory Style -- a Traditional Mode of Singing

Before studying Martha's performances of Child 2 and Child 106 in detail, it will be helpful to demonstrate her position as a tradition bearer. In previous chapters I have discussed Martha's performances of narratives sung to a standard strophe, the more conventional form of a song tune. In these discussions I cited examples of similar recorded performances from travellers in Scotland, and from Caroline Hughes of England -- to show that Martha's handling of tunes and her particular performances were not sui generis. She was not idiosyncratic with respect to other traveller individuals who sang or have sung narratives. And she was by no means an exceptional or outstanding singer; rather, ordinary. (See definition, chapter one.)

It is more difficult to assess her position within a tradition of narrative improvisation because we do not have much evidence in print of the traditional practice of improvising narrative songs. There are, however, recordings of older travellers singing narratives to variable intonations, sometimes in a declamatory style described by traveller Rabbie Townsley as 'mair speaking' (after listening to Martha Johnstone's performance of "Breastbone" in 1975). Hamish Henderson's tapes made on visits to the camp sites and winter lodgings of travellers in the 1950s contain fine examples of ballads sung to variable melodies and not unusually in a style of delivery approximating impassioned speech e.g., Maggie Wilson's "Lord Bateman," 55/75/A2.

The short span of some of Martha Johnstone's tunes and the lack of a melodious quality to her singing reminded Duncan Williamson of his own mother's singing style:

> My mother could go on forever and ever and ever on this . . . we used to call it 'a one-part song.' We used to say, 'For God's sake, Mother, could you no change it!' . . . as if it was 'gibberish.' It was all right to hear it for a wee while. My faither used to say, 'For God's sake, woman, cuid you no go any farther than that,' And she would say, 'Well, I canna go any farther than that because that's the way my father and mother used ta dae it.' 'Well,' he said, 'I'll tell you one thing, your faither and mother couldna dae it nae worse than what you're daein it!' Well, she had nae other choice, it was the only thing she had.
>
> (DW, 83/73/A)

Duncan's testimony suggests that the practice of 'intoning' a song, or chanting it to a short repetitive phrase was traditional in certain families only. Not enough research has been done on this subject so it is impossible to conclude how widespread or limited the practice was. But it is most interesting to note that on Martha's improvisatory style in general, after listening to many of Martha's narrative performances on tape and hearing her sing in her own home, Duncan gave the following testimony, evidence of the authenticity of improvisation in traveller tradition:

> To me she's [Martha's] on*y* just another auld singer .... A heard hundreds o auld women like auld Peasie [M's nickname], hundreds. Auld Lizzie Kelby and ma Auntie, ma Auntie Jeannie and ma Auntie Mary and Auntie Nellie and auld Katie and auld Jeannie and auld Belloch — and all the MacDonald women — just the same idea. That was the style, that was the on*y*, the way they done it. If you'd ha' heard two or three other auld traveller women, compared with auld Peasie, you wouldnae paid much attention. If you had had heard my mother at one time

> singin . . . I mean the auld traivellers had their ain style o daein things and singin things and canterin tunes and music, their ain types and their ain way o music, see what I mean, their ain way o daein it. .... And people would say, 'Ach, I wadna listen to the like o that,' but the auld person who was daein it wasna daein nothing oot o the way, they were only daein what they done and what they knew and what they heard.
>
> (DW, 83/73/A)

The recordings lodged in the School of Scottish Studies archives, and the testimonies of living travellers, are positive evidence of a tradition of narrative improvisation among the travellers. But the state of the tradition may be less 'perfect' than it was in the past; it is impossible to judge at this stage of research. What is certain and important is that Martha Johnstone's performances of ballads and old songs were 'traditional' to her -- evident from her expressed attitude towards the old songs and her attitude towards her own family history. The topic she discussed most was her family history, and from her expressions of love and high regard for her forbears, we can be sure her way of performing old songs was 'handed down;' for she was faithful to her sources, the singers from whom she'd heard and learned her songs. Before 'intoning' "Sir James the Rose" (CH 213) for Hamish Henderson, she told him, "Whether it's right or wrong fra me, it's just as I got it frae, frae the old people." (57/7) (See ex. 18a)

II.2. Improvising the Music of Child 2, "The Task"

"The Task" was recorded five times from Martha between 1955 and 1977. I shall discuss the variants in reverse order diachronically because the last is least complicated musically. In 1977 Martha sang the text of the narrative to a definitive tune, the "Airdrie" triphrasal strophe. This tune was not sung until strophe III. Before III, Martha used two other 'tunes' or melodic ideas: I was sung to the A and B phrases of "Midland Green" (ex. 1a, p. 201), and II began with a repeated phrase or intonation occurring most frequently in another of Martha's narratives, Child 106, discussed below. This phrase, T , featured in every performance of "The Task" by Martha, but it was subject to more or less variation in the earlier and latter variants respectively.

As with the "Breastbone" performance on this occasion in 1977, "The Task" was not up to Martha's usual standard; it was most unusual for her to sing three different melodies at the start of a song. We can presume Martha was not in the best frame of mind to sing the ballad from her testimony given prior to the performance. She had a mental preoccupation with another song she tried in vain to recall; on my follow-up visit she remembered it was the song "Oh Nancy" -- also sung to the "Midland Green" phrases.

Duncan -- You promised to sing us, eh, about the shirt, the Holland shirt.

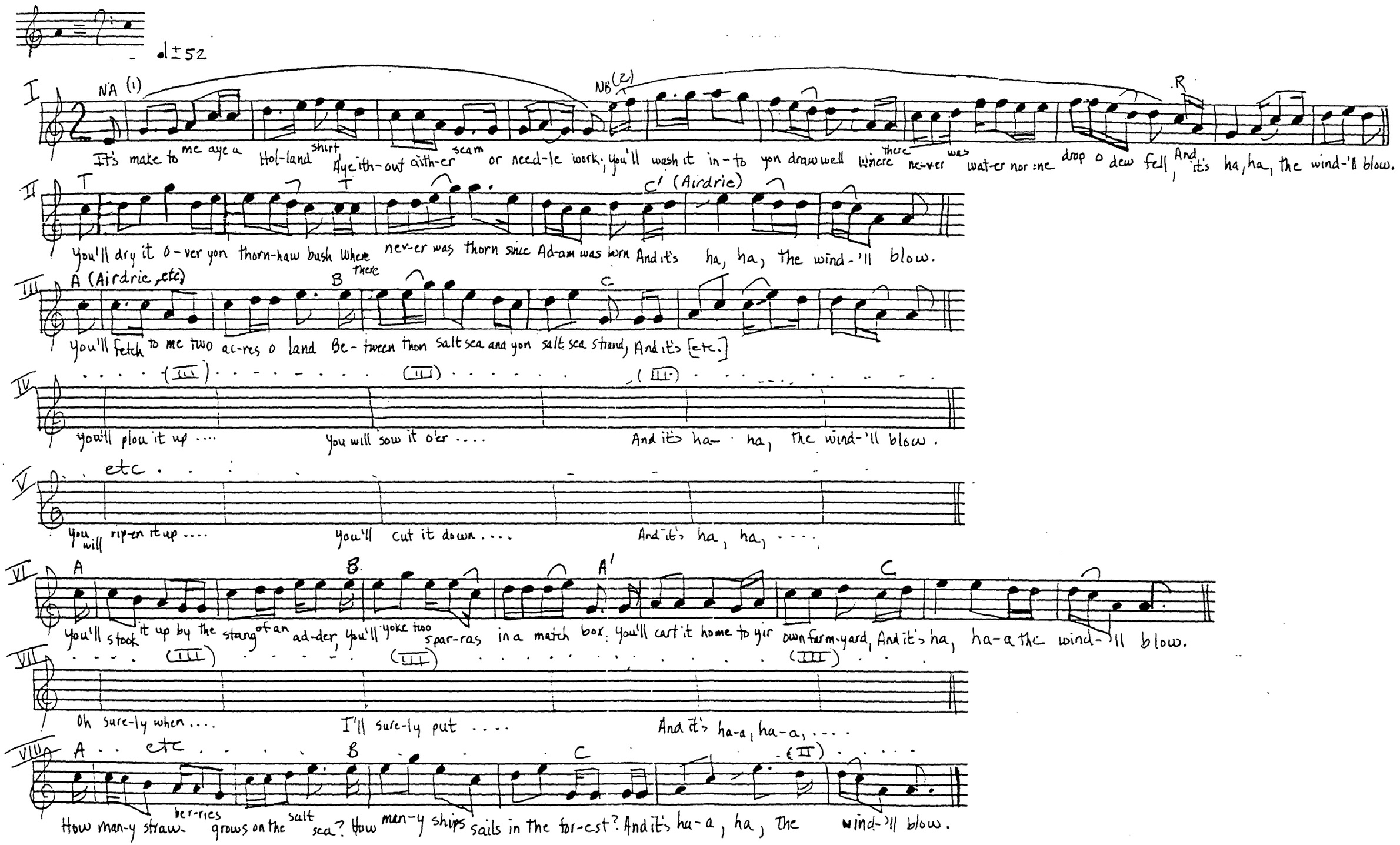
M -- Oh, gosh sake! I had yin there, I was going to sing that there . . . ye see, they go oot o my head, Bessie her niece .

Bessie -- Aye, so they do. She's right enough, they go oot o yir heid.

D -- Try it, try it, gie us a wee bit o it.

(77/145/B4)

Example 11. Martha Johnstone, "The Task," 77/145/B5.



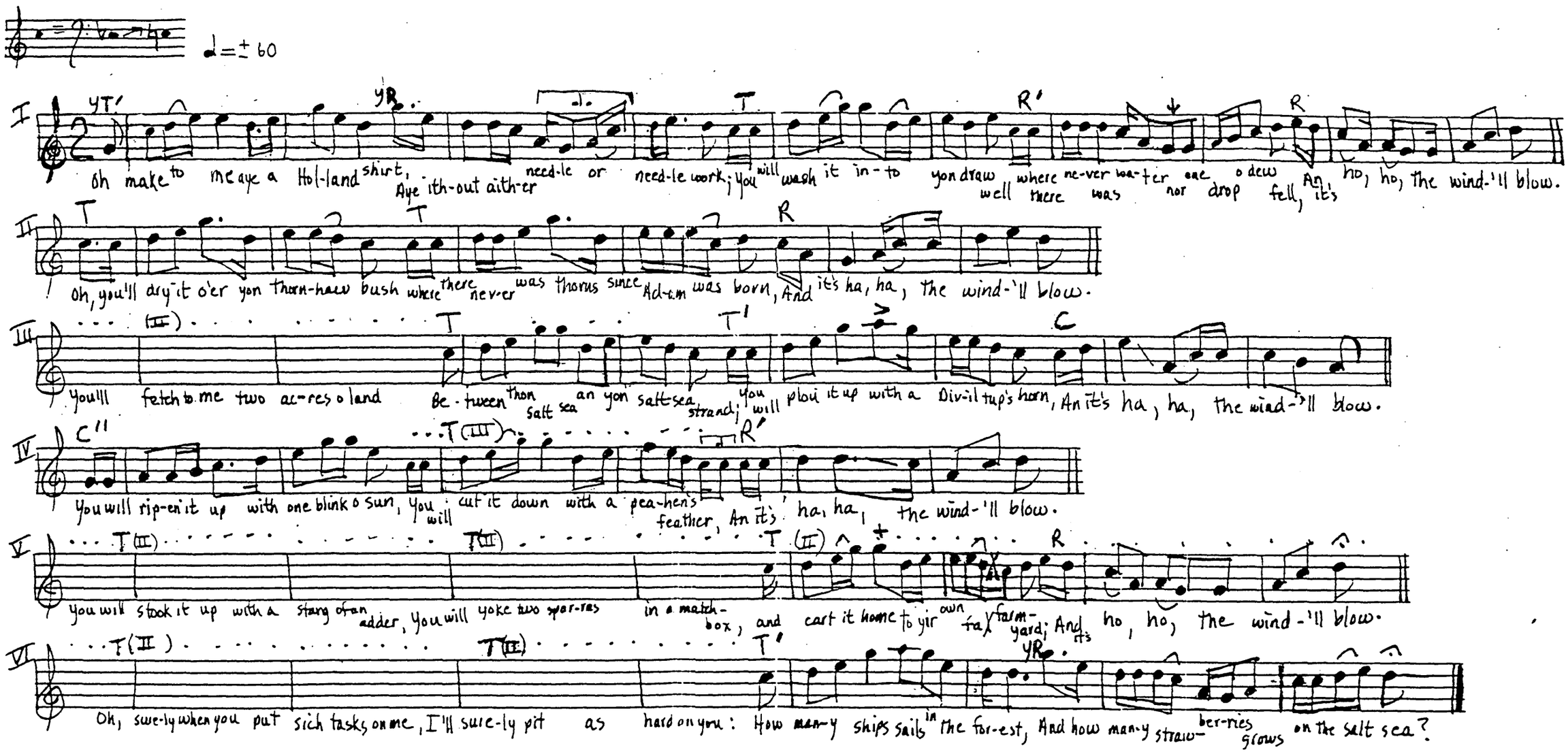
Martha would have preferred singing "Oh Nancy" when she sang "The Task" in 1977, and she sang this narrative to honour her traveller guest's request. Obviously, the opening phrases were pre-empted by her desire to sing the other song. "Airdrie" was not sung by Martha on this occasion, but when she 'borrowed' its refrain phrase at the end of II, this undoubtedly brought forward the rest of the tune.

By comparison, the 1975 performance of "The Task" was fairly regular in its melodic form: one intonation, T, was repeated and 'ended' by a refrain intonation, R. The "Airdrie" refrain, C, occurred at the end of III -- but the singer had been disturbed when I indicated I had to change the tape track. Thus the first phrase of IV was a transitional intonation, the opening motive of C extended, as the singer 'picked up' her lost T phrase. The ballad on this occasion did not end with the refrain line, although a musical equivalent of the refrain phrase, YR, gave the song a satisfactory finish. But this hiatus in musical and textual forms at the ending of a performance is not atypical of Martha, cf. ex. 3, chapter four; and we may question its correctness in the context of the tradition of improvisation. (See "Yellow Hair" discussion below, II.3.2.)

Just before singing "The Task" in 1975 Martha had said, "I'll say it, I'll say the words." This testimony expresses clearly Martha's intention to recite the ballad in song; she was less intent on singing. The narrative in this performance was less a song and more an intoned narration. The proximity of the narration to poetic recitation is evident in its metre and rhythm. Neither a strict duple nor a strict triple metre can be assigned. The second stress of the iambic foot varies in duration, from a half beat to a full beat. This fluidity of metre applies also to Martha's earlier

recordings of "The Task". See exx. 13, 14. And they are close to the epic style of "rimur" as Knudsen described it:

Example 12. Martha Johnstone, "The Task," 75/197/A6. CS



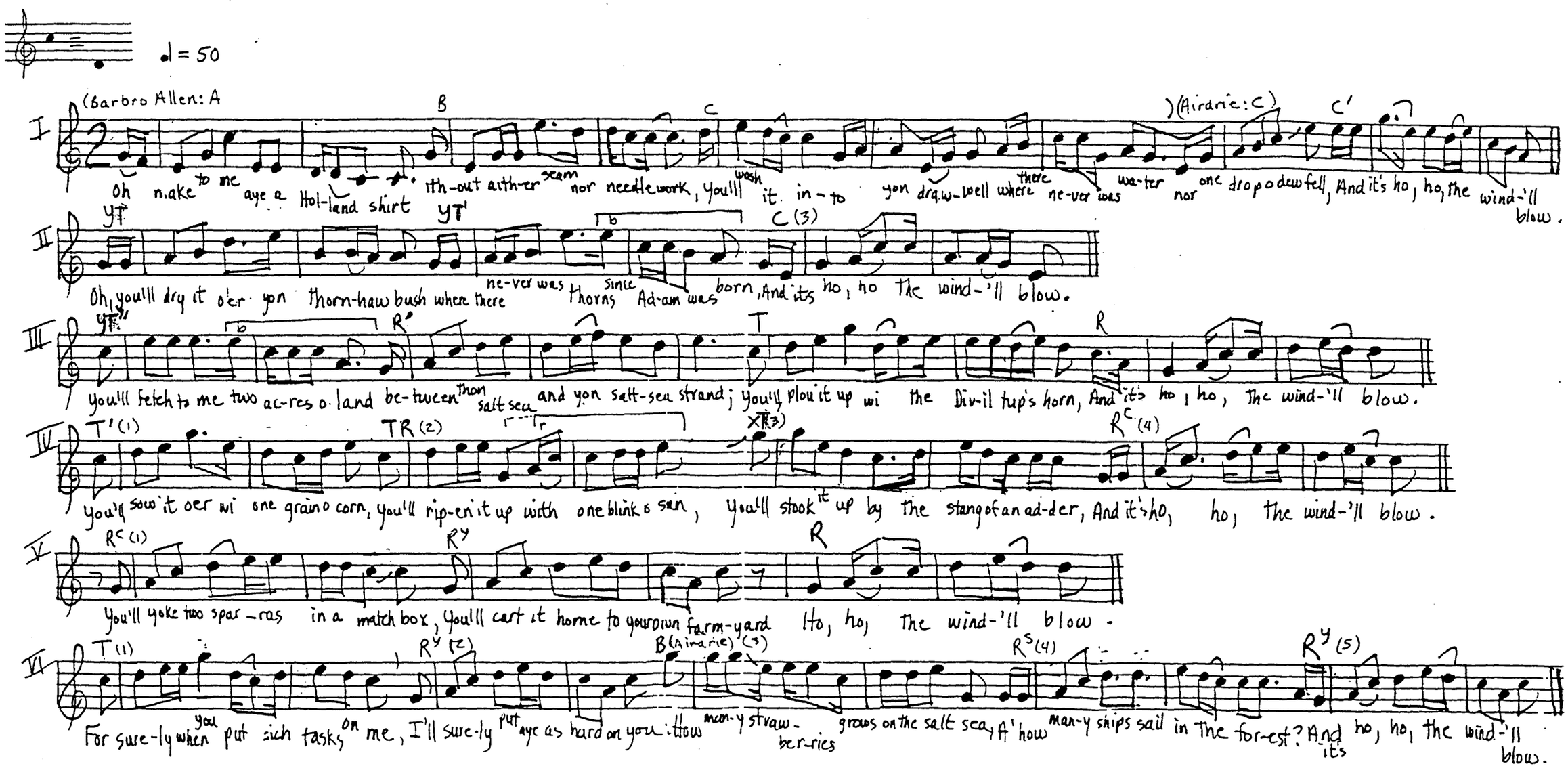
> Narrative song in the epic style is in most areas connected with a bardic tradition, as in Celtic areas and in Slavic countries. .... 'The artist's task was to expound the profound meaning of events to his fellowmen, to make plain to them the process, the necessity, and the rules of social and historical development, to solve for them the riddle of the essential relationship between man and nature and man and society.' The performance of 'rimur' in Iceland is the most direct musical manifestation of the epic style in the Norse countries today. Icelanders do not sing 'rimur,' it is rather an intoned narration.
>
> (Knudsen, 1967/1, p. 1)

II.2.1. The variable intonations. The performance of "The Task" eighteen years prior to the 1975 variant did not differ in its text apart from a few minor details: taken together, strophe IV and V were composed of the same number of lines, although the 3-phrase IV in 1975 was a quadriphrasal strophe in 1957 with the added line, "You'll sow it oer wi one grain o corn;" V in 1957 was triphrasal when Martha omitted the "cut it down ...." line. Also, the ballad ended with the refrain; and the girl's questions were in reverse order.

The main difference was in the music. It was characterized by greater variability. The opening strophe began with the standard quadriphrasal strophe of Martha's "Barbro Allen" tune. The second half of (4) in I was adjusted as Martha neared the first refrain, sung to the "Airdrie" C' variant. Martha did not establish the usual "Task" refrain, R, until the end of III because the particular modal composition of the "Yellow Hair" T phrase, II (1) and (2), interfered with her correct

formulation of the refrain R. Thus the refrain at II (3) was created on the analogy of the "Airdrie" C phrase, but peaking on the subjective tonic, C, the initial pitch of the "Task" narrative phrase, T, first sung at III (3). The modal adjustment was begun in II, in (2)'s second motive motive, b; see ex. 13.

Example 13. Martha Johnstone, "The Task," 57/7.



No phrase in this variant of "The Task" was repeated exactly more than twice; T, which had recurred regularly and simply unvaried in 1975, occurred only twice without variation in 1957. R, relegated exclusively to the refrain position in 1975, occurred without the refrain in every strophe from III in 1957. After a difficult start, Martha appeared to favour the tonal implications of T, in C. And the tonal ambiguity of R, with its decisive final on d, the subjective supertonic, was supplanted with variations R^c and R^y more definitely in C, in IV and VI. The use of R^c and R^y for the two narrative phrases (1) and (2) of V was the definite pronouncement of the singer's choice of tonality; then she sang the R phrase with its final emphasis on the subjective supertonic.

Was this vacillation between two tonal centres a musical fumbling? Was Martha trying to sing the ballad to a melody with one tonality; but feeling this 'uncomfortable' in the context of an older style when bitonality was the norm, would she revert to the more ambiguous (tonally) R -- the phrase she did eventually prefer in the latter performances for the 'ending intonation' -- at the end of V? Or was there a 'literary' reason: did she wish to contrast the tonal emphasis of R with the six preceding phrases, marking the end of the devil's tasks, a sectional 'division' in the story?

The musical evidence is non-supportive. Establishing the proper i.e. usual, mode of T was a problem for Martha at the start of this performance. So it is not unreasonable to conclude she was probably not in control of the song's tonality. This ballad was one of the first Martha sang on this recording session and she may have been nervous or excited about performing for her non-traveller visitors.

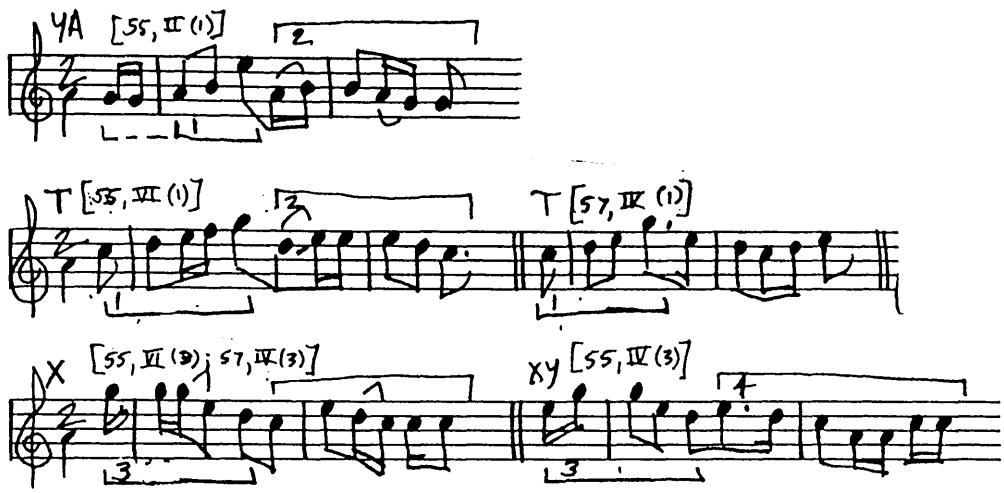
The performance two years prior to this one featured many of the same intonations, YT, C (from "Airdrie"), R, R^c, R^y, T and XT. It will be useful to list them for easier reference -- many of them recur in Child 106. The intonations are closely related to one another by virtue of their opening and closing motives, labeled with arabic numbers in the figure (1).

By comparison with the later performances of "The Task," the 1955 performance was the most irregular. Mr Collinson described the melody as "exceedingly irregular" and "rhapsodic," pointing out the several different final cadence pitches. (1965, p. 8)[5] The irregularity was occasioned by the variable refrain. Two phrases, R and C (from "Airdrie"), were alternated for the refrain from II - V; C occurred first at II (3). The song ended on R^s , a synthesis of the two disparate phrases, R and C. See ex. 17 .

The phrasal correspondence with the 1957 performance was close after I; Martha opened the 1955 performance with a two-fold repetition of "Yellow Hair's" T phrase; it also occurred as (1) and (2) of II. A refrain line did not end the first strophe, but YR of "Yellow Hair" has been shown to be a musical equivalent of the refrain (re.

discussion of the 1975 "Task" above, p. 235).

Opening Intonations (preferred or usual)



Ending Intonations (preferred or usual)

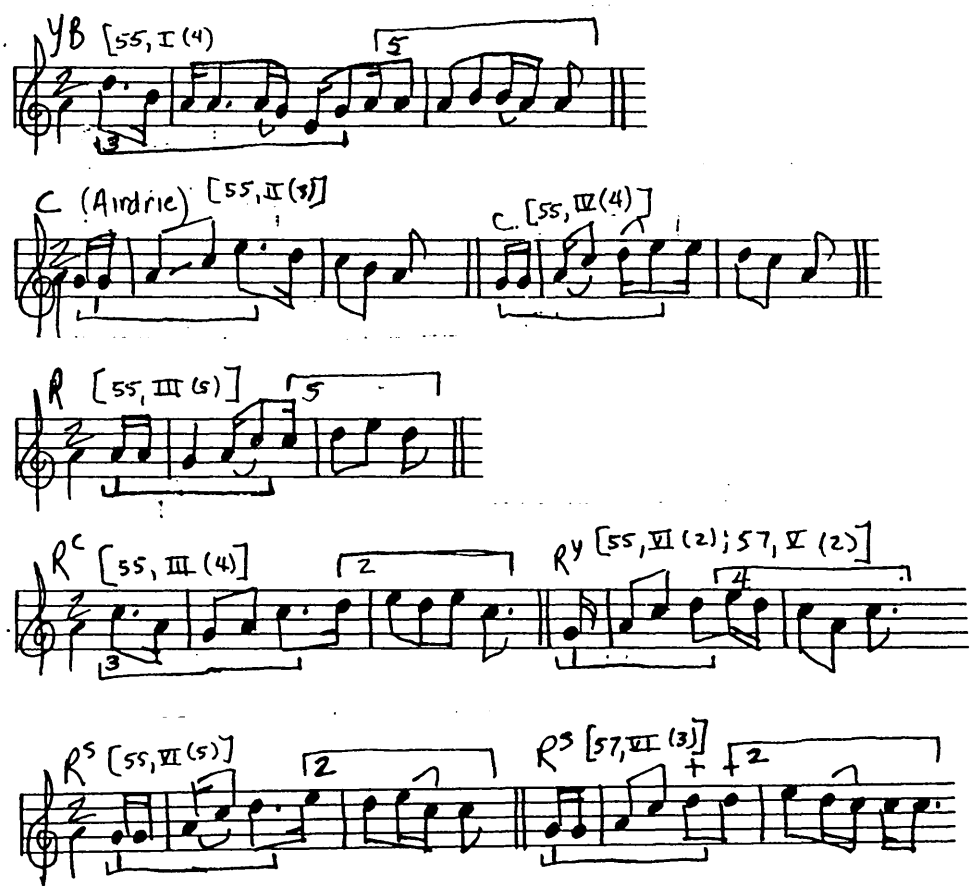
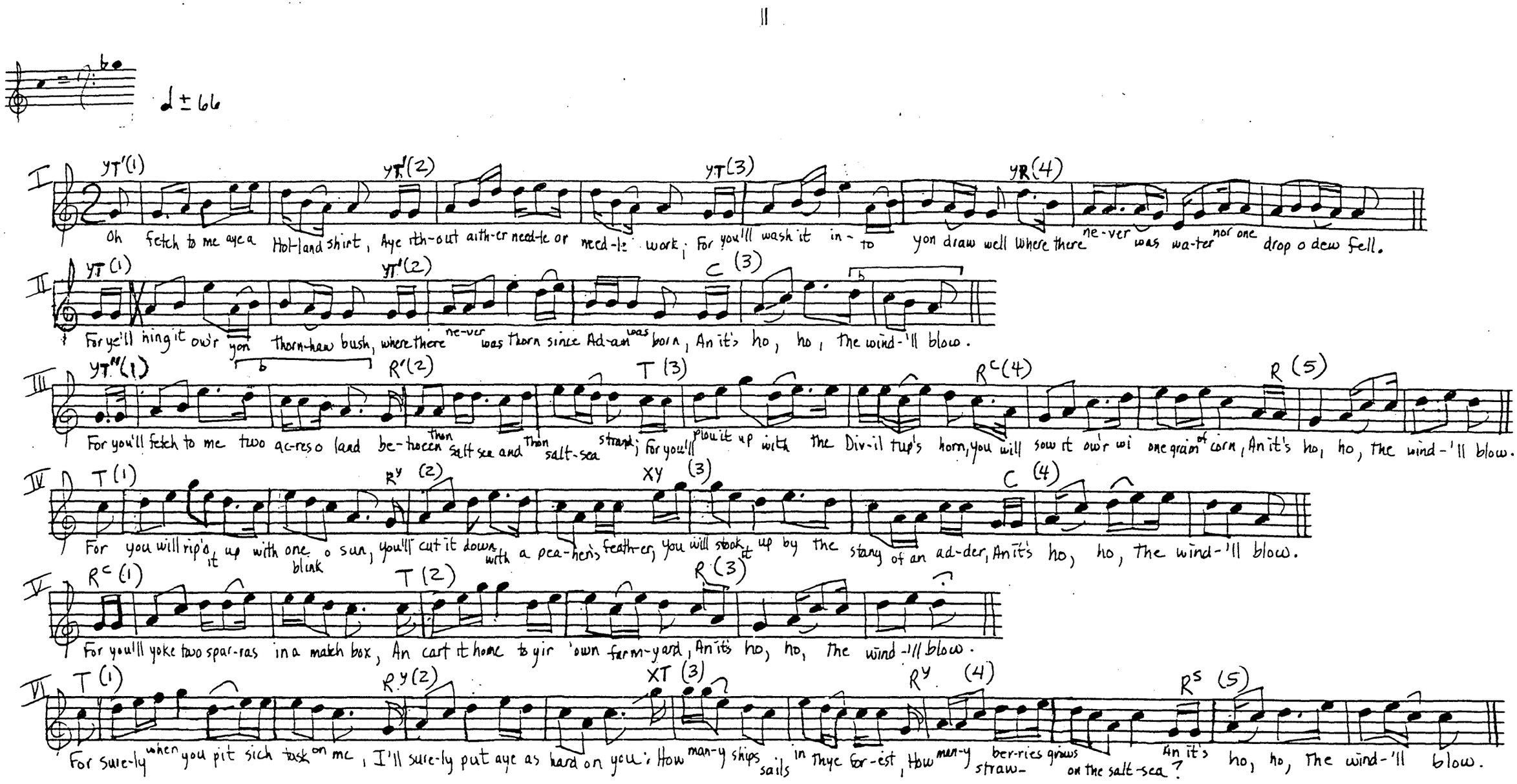


Figure 1. Intonations used in the 1955 and 1957 performances of "The Task," with analysis of motives.

Example 14. Martha Johnstone, "The Task," 55/46. CS



All the lines of the song as Martha ever sang it are present in this first recorded performance. T recurs at least once in every strophe after II, as the opening intonation in those strophes following the end refrain R. In those strophes following the C refrain (from "Airdrie"), T occurred in second or third position, at the centre of those strophes finishing with R — III and V. If the phrases XT and XY are considered variants of T (their first motives are related because X's is the retrograde of T's), then the strophes take on a basic shape: apart from the refrain, R and T alternate from III (2).

As in 1957, the definitive "Task" mode, g - a - c - d - e, was not established from the start. Because it did not crystallize until III (2), and because it took Martha exactly that same length to establish it in 1957, we may ask whether the narrative might have been purposely opened with an introductory i.e., loosely formed episode? Was the devil's first task purposely sung to a different mode — complying with the singer's conception of a separate part of the story? The first part of the story, the devil's first task (I and II), was sung to a narrative phrase repeated and followed by a refrain phrase to end the two verses. The balance of the story was sung to two phrases alternating with each other, one having a double function as a refrain phrase and a narrative phrase. The idea that the story could have had separate parts for the singer shows that variability and song form were controlled.

But is this explanation right? There is very good musical evidence to support the contrary, that Martha Johnstone was not in control of her melodies, their modality, tonality or variability. She could and would juxtapose phrases from recognizably different 'tunes' at the start of any one performance. There are sufficient

counterexamples to sway the argument to the negative -- her melodic variability was undisciplined and apparently unrestrained at the start of some narrative songs.

Yet another explanation may be offered about the 'introductory,' loosely formed or 'ill-formed' beginning of Martha Johnstone's performances of "The Task." Her version of the ballad varied noticably from other travellers' versions collected in Perthshire, where Martha settled in the last half of her life. In the sung versions I collected from her oldest son and John MacDonald, cf. exx. 15, 16, the task set by the devil comprises the first half of the song; the balance of the text, referring to the farming task, is the girl's reply to the devil. The two questions Martha ends her version with, 'the one about the sea and the wood' (MJ, 75/197/A6), are non-existent in other travellers' versions of the ballad thus far recorded. It may well be the case that Martha's "Task" is faulty, by comparison with the traditional text of this ballad as the travellers know and sing it. Her experience of this ballad, her listening experience was probably minimal, and she may well have committed to memory an 'incorrect' text. This might be one contributing factor to its variability, why the beginning of the song as she sang it was always musically different and apparently always problematic.

The last but not least possiblity to consider, why this particular narrative was musically 'unsettled' for Martha, is that her experience of the narrative tradition, though narrow, was deep. Because this song's subject is a farm girl's encounter with the devil, there may be a significant reason -- 'perhaps deriving from ritual' (Lord, 1960, p. 89) -- for the persistent irregularity, the improvisatory musical start to this ballad. For it is a fact, all recordings of this ballad

Example 15. Alexander Reid (Martha Johnstone's oldest son), text of Child 2, 75/122/A2. (Tocher 20, p. 39)

I Go mak tae me a Highland shirt
Withoot a seam or needle a work,
And the dreary, dreary winds blaw my plaidie awa.

II You'll wash it in a ne'er dry well
Where there ne'er was water nor one drop o dew fell;
You'll dry it on a thorn haw bush
Where there ne'er was thorns since Adam was born,
And the dreary, dreary wind blaw my plaidie awa.

III O devil, o de'il, ye put a task on me
And it's surely I'll put one on you;
You will find to me three acre o land
Between the salt sea and the salt sea strand,
You will plough it up with a tup's horn -
[spoken] a tup doesn't have a horn - (?)
You will sow it over with one pea o corn,
And the dreary, dreary wind 'll nae blaw my plaidie awa.

IV You will cut it down with a peahen feather,
You will stook it up with a tongue of an adder;
You will yoke two sparrows in a match-box*
And cart it home to our own farm yard,
And the dreary, dreary wind 'll blaw my plaidie awa.

*"It's supposed to be a snuff-box - I said a match-box."

Example 16. John MacDonald, opening verses and prose introduction of performances of Child 2, 75/98/A1 and a 1967 variant from MacColl, p. 49.

1975

"This is a song that was made years ago by a farm girl, that was her father had a farm. And in those days if you went out o your boundary for a walk or that you were supposed to meet evil spirits and devils and things. So this winter's day this girl went for a walk and she went by the sea. And she met the devil on the way. And he told her that she was out o her bounds, that he was going to take her with him. So she said that she would come to a bargain with him. So she made a bargain. And this is the song. Now."

I For between yon salt sea and yon sea strand
Blow, blow, blow ye winds, blow.
For she met the devil by the way,
And the dreary winds did blaw her plaidie awa.

II For you'll wash to me three holland shirts
Blow, blow, blow ye winds, blow.
Aye between yon salt sea and yon sea strand,
And the dreary winds did blaw her plaidie awa.

[cont'd]

1967

I For there once was a fair maid went a-walk,
Blaw, blaw, blaw ye winds blaw;
Ay, between yon salt sea and yon sea strand,
And the dreary wind's blawed my plaidie awa'.

II For as she met a devil by the way,
Blaw, blaw, blaw ye winds blaw;
And to her he did give a task,
And the dreary winds did blaw her plaidie awa'.*

III For you'll make to me a holland shirt (etc.)
Without either seam or needle-work (etc.)

from travellers feature irregularities or inconsistencies in diachronic variants of the song's first strophes. I have discussed the meaning for travellers and their taboo speaking of the Devil in connection with another devil ballad, CH 3, where He riddles a mortal opponent as in Child 2, see chapter 2, III.2. It may well be the case that Martha would not (ever) sing a regular or stable beginning to "The Task" because according to her belief, pinpointing or clarifying the musical form might be 'dangerous.'

Perhaps improvisatory beginnings of narrative songs are a sign from a former practice when the first part of a sung-story was spoken. Or perhaps the improvisatory beginning of a sung narrative is a 'preparatory' passage into the song proper, a time for the narrator and listener both to get ready for the 'real song' -- the world of the story in music.

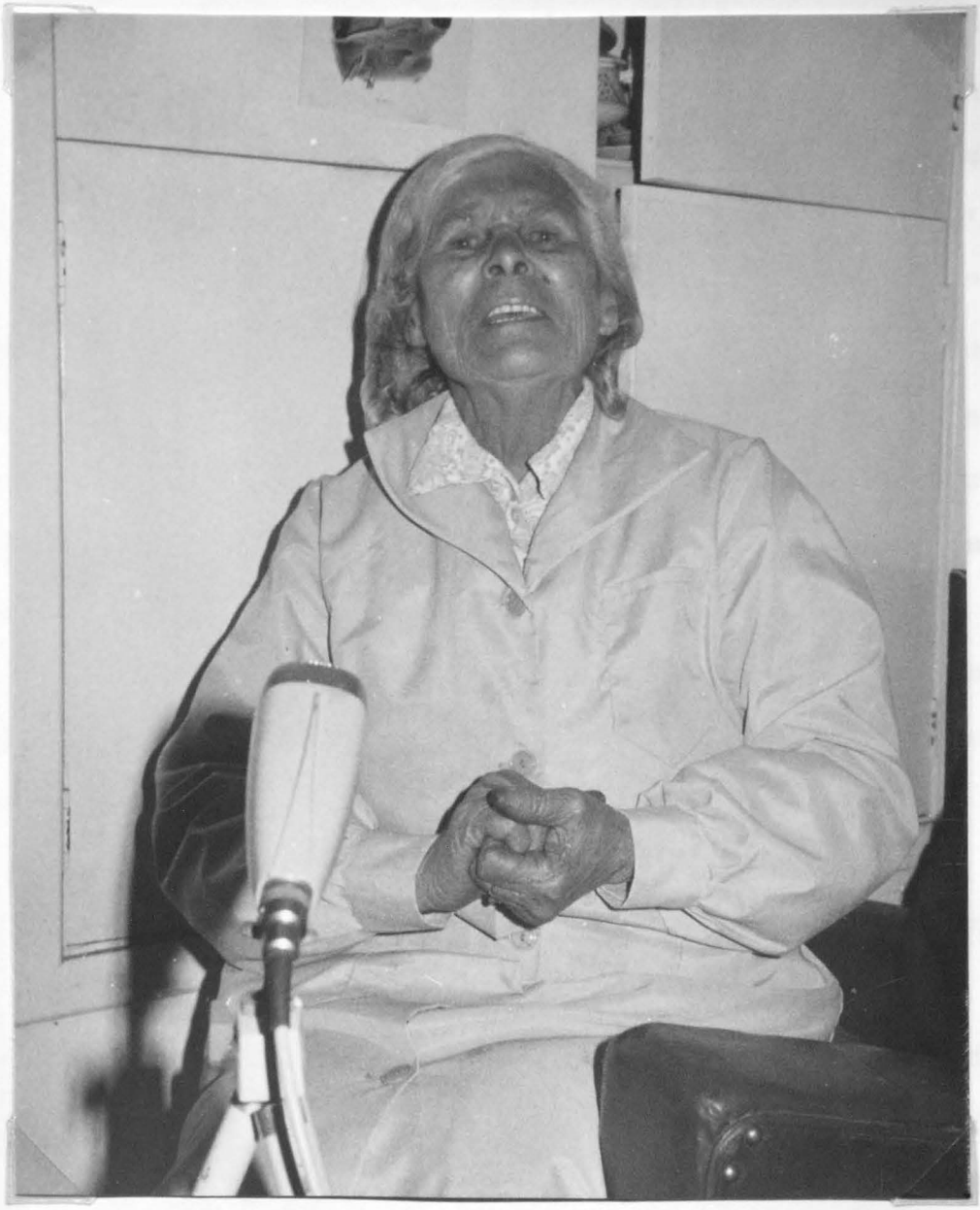
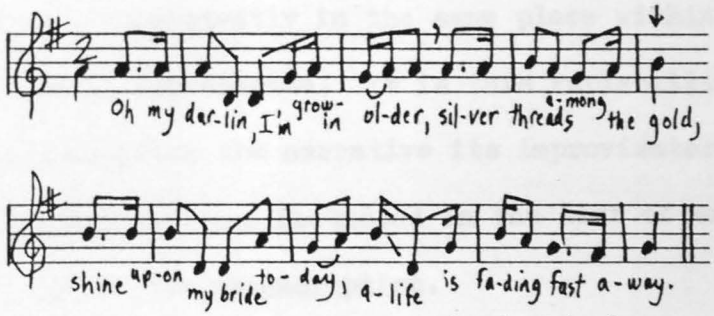


Plate 1. Martha Johnstone singing,



(77/146/A4)

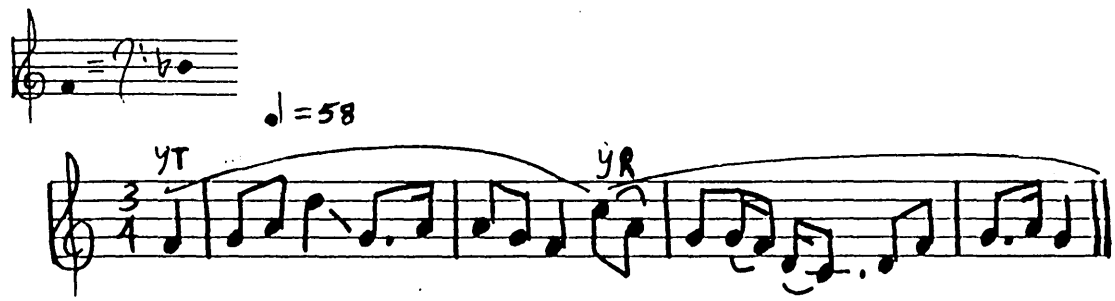
Coupar Angus, May, 1977.

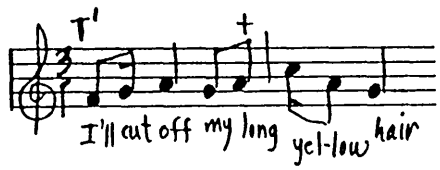
II.3. Improvising the Music of Child 106

"I'll cut off my long Yellow Hair," Martha Johnstone's version of Child 106, was one of her 'special' songs. In 1978 after she sang this ballad I questioned her what she meant by 'special;' she said that 'a song made in the olden time,' like "Yellow Hair," was 'special' because it was "well put together, complete, every word matched each other," and it had something "hearty" which "makes you listen." (78/109/A5) Martha offered to sing "Yellow Hair" on five out of six occasions when she was recorded; and judging by her reactions and comments after performances, we can be sure she took pleasure in singing this song. For these reasons it might be called her 'best song' and criticism of irregularities, its variability in performances, must be exercised with care.

II.3.1. Performances with a standard strophe subject to improvisation. Five of the six performances recorded from 1955 - 1978 were sung to a standard biphrasal strophe, the memorized text having been narrated as couplets. One of these standard strophe performances was exclusively a couplet ballad with no strophic irregularities, sung for me on my first visit to Martha, see ex. 17. Four of the other performances included irregular strophes, but the irregular strophes were not consistently in the same place within the text from performance to performance. It is this variability in irregularity which gives the narrative its improvisatory character. The improvised strophes are footnoted in the text of ex. 17 and shown at the end of the transcription.

Example 17. Martha Johnstone, "I'll cut off my long Yellow Hair," 75/196/B4; standard strophe, memorized text; complete song incorporating variations and variant phrases. CS



I 

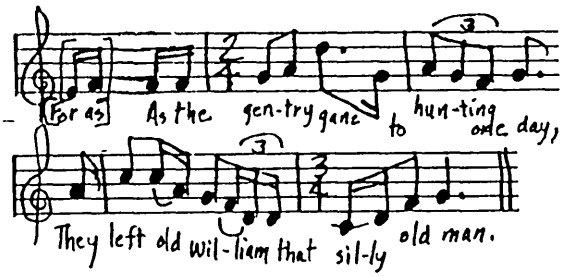
YR And I'll put myself into men's roparr'l.[1]

II YT To the king's own hall to do some work;
YR Say'n, What work, what work, oh lass can you do?

III YT Sure it's anything that you put me to,[2]
YR To be a hasher all in your hall.

IV YT To be a hasher all in your hall,
YR To please your ladies and nobles all.

V YT To make your bedsall both soft and fine,[3]
YR To please your ladies and 'obles all.

VI 

VII YT Sometimes she sang and sometimes she mourned,
YR Say'n, God help, God help, all poor womankind.

VIII YT For when ladies and gent from a-hunting came,
YR Say'n, What news, what news, has sweet William to tell?

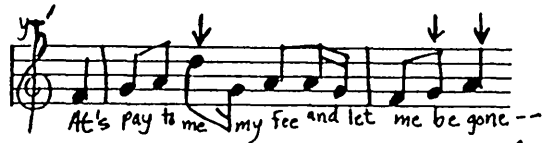
IX YT Good news, good news, that I have to tell,
YR For a gentleman to become a queen.

X YT If that's a lie that you tell to me,
YR Your head it lies, all into my gate.

XI YT If that's the truth that you tell to me,
YR I shall make you the laird of a high degree.

XII YT For they took her to aye a silent room,
YR And the' found thye breast all it give the sook.

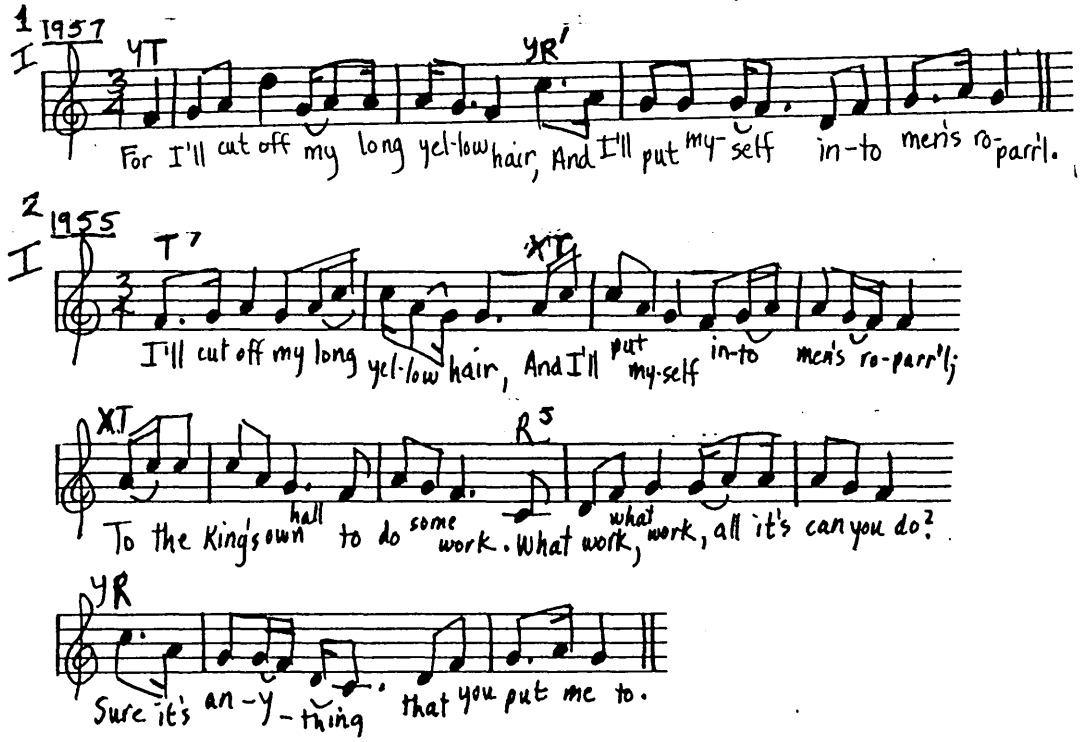
XIII YT Oh fetch to me aa the robes of green,
YR To see hoo a gent shall become a queen.

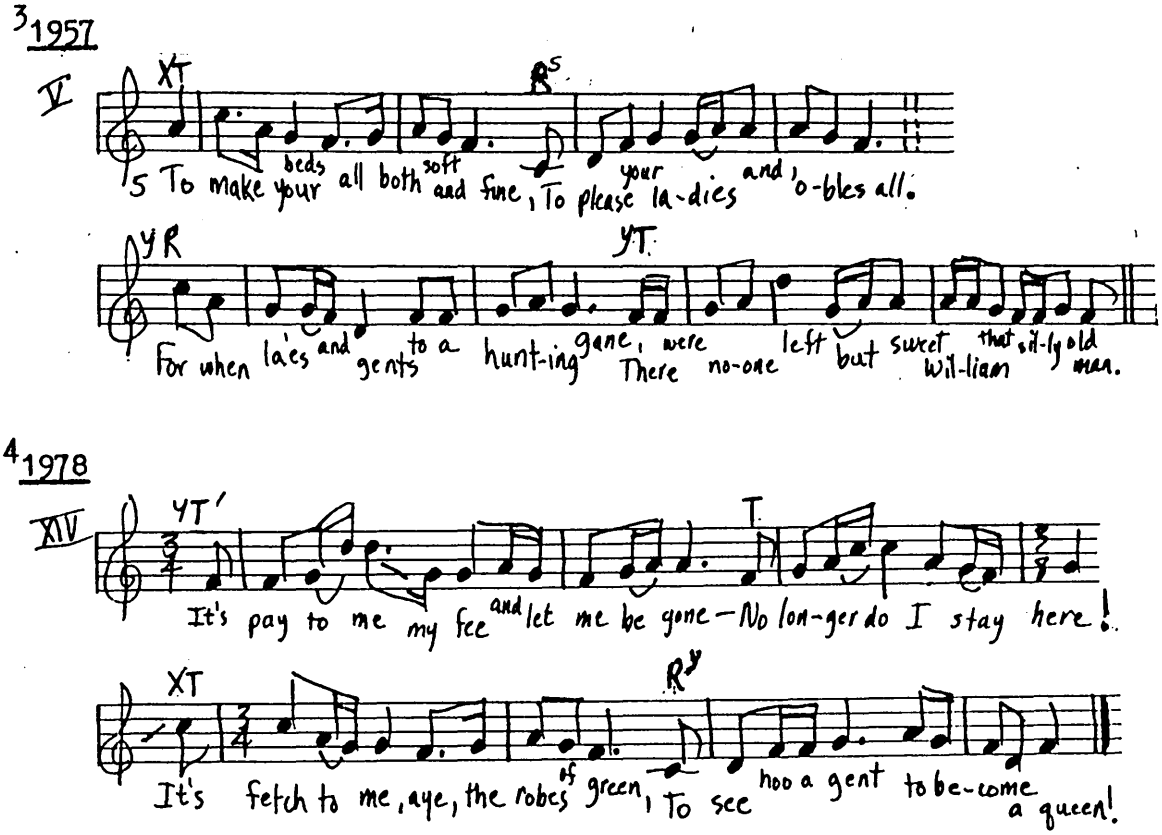
XIV 

YR No longer do I stay here. 4

XV YT It's fetch to me aa the robes of green,
YR To see hoo a gent to become a queen!

Improvised Strophes in Diachronic Variants





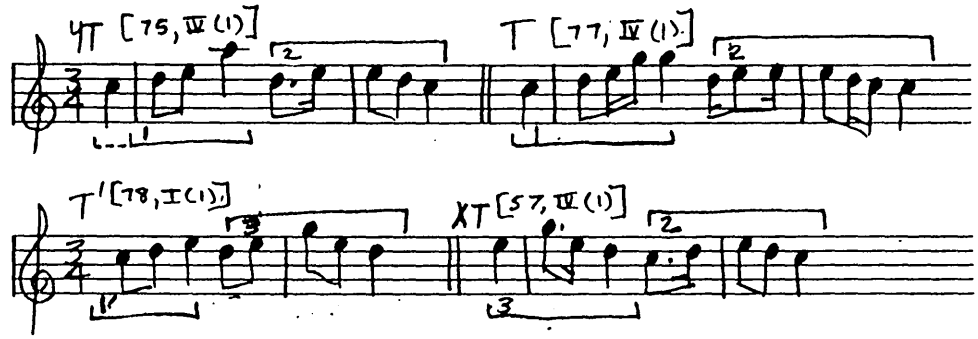
The improvised irregular strophes in the "Yellow Hair" variants would have occurred for a number of reasons e.g., difficulty in establishing the usual or proper form of the standard intonations (1955/I, 1957/I), distraction from a non-traveller listener (1957/IV - V), giving emphasis to a meaningful part of the story (1978/XIV), or varied experiences hearing parts of the song sung or told. A detailed discussion of each variant would not yield any new information about variability in narrative performances by Martha. What is more important at this point in the study is how the improvisations could arise musically.

The standard strophe featuring in every performance of "Yellow Hair" except the 1977 variant, was composed of two short phrases, YT and YR. Why this strophe should be subject to improvisation or variability is due to its particular melodic form.

The two phrases, YT and YR, are arch-like but are inversions of each other. Each is made up of two motives which were essential "building units" (cf. Knudsen, 1976, p. 50), capable of isolated development and combination into phrasal variants of the basic YT and YR. Hendren would have analyzed the strophe as a "circular tune" or continuous melody because of the tension between both f and g, and d and c; f begins and ends phras YT; g is the final of YR; d was the highest pitch of the strophe, in YT in the centre of its full measure; c was the lowest pitch of the strophe, in YR in the centre of its full measure (cf. Hendren, 1936, p. 50). This analysis might clarify the particular organicity and viability of this strophe, how the phrases could be varied and retain an essential relationship to each other, not disturbing the tension of the melody.

For it is remarkable, in every performance of "Yellow Hair," the irregularities or irregular strophes which occurred, were not unique phrasal variations, but repetitions of intonations occurring in "The Task" and "Airdrie," in "Breastbone" and "King William." In addition to the primary YT and YR, shown in fig. 2 with their motives bracketed and labeled for comparison with other intonations, Martha made use of four already identified in "The Task," fig. 1; they are T, XT, R^{y} and R^{s}. Two not used in "The Task," T' and YJ, complete the basic set of eight intonations which featured in the six performances of "Yellow Hair" between 1955 and 1978.

Opening Intonations (preferred or usual)



Ending Intonations (preferred or usual)

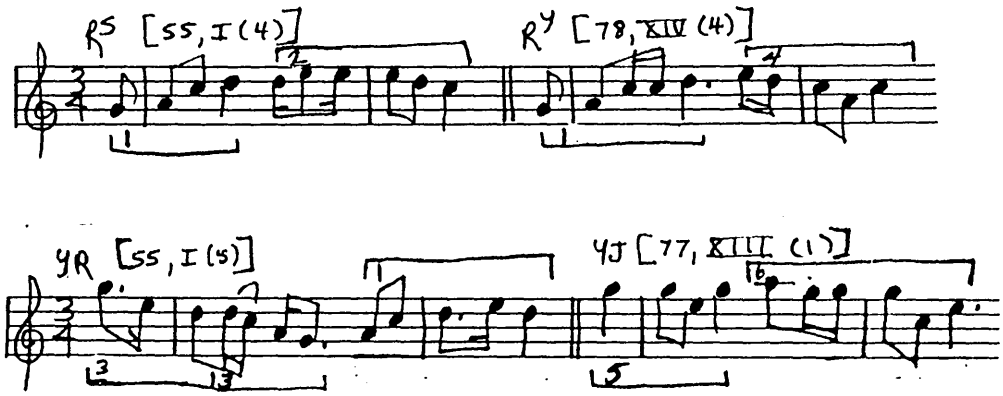


Figure 2. Intonations used in performances of "Yellow Hair," 1955 - 1978. Analysis of motives corresponds to analysis of "The Task" intonations, Fig. 1.

II.3.2. A performance with a variable 'standard strophe.'

The 1977 performance of "Yellow Hair" by Martha for her traveller friends was like the other narrative performances on that occasion, not up to her usual standard or inconsistent with her singing of particular narratives on other occasions. The standard intonations of "Yellow Hair," YT and YR, were not a feature of this performance -- YT was not sung at all. Instead, variable intonations T, XT and YJ occurred where YT might have. Martha opened the narrative quite differently from the other five performances, with intonations more common to "The Task," a narrative she'd sung earlier in the ceilidh. Like "The Task" performances in the 1950s, Martha began in a different mode from the usual pentatonic melody we have identified as "Yellow Hair." Martha was 'working' with a heptatonic melody and figurations not unrelated to her "Airdrie" melody; the fourth phrase of I was sung to the "Airdrie" C phrase. (The "Airdrie" tune had been sung to "The Task" prior to this performance on this occasion.) By (4) Martha had established a tonal centre, f, which had been obscured at the very start by her turning phrase (1) back on itself rather than singing the more usual dominant as the peak of an arch-like construction, or the normal T'.

Martha was shy singing for her traveller audience. This was the only performance of "Yellow Hair" not offered by the singer, and just before singing she reminded everyone, "It'll not be very good, mind!" There are probably two reasons why Martha did not achieve her usual YT intonation after the proper pentatonic mode had been established, along with YR at (5). She was tired, after having sung several long songs, including "Breastbone" and "The Task;" the after noon had been a full one for her -- she'd been telling stories and cracks earlier

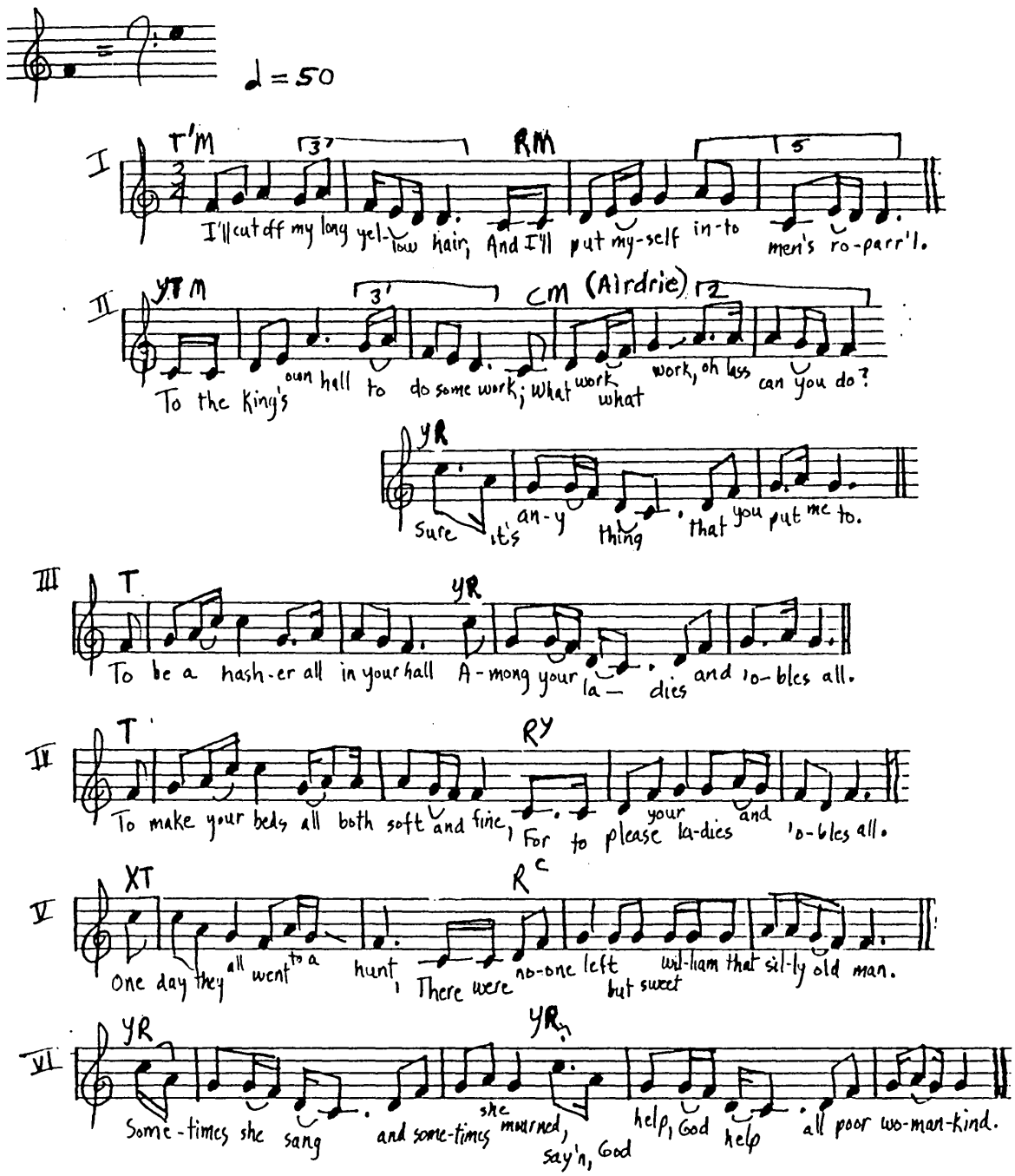
in the ceilidh. So, the intonation T was used in place of YT because it was easier to sing the dominant than the submediant above tonic.

The second reason Martha probably sang T, along with another intonation characteristic of "The Task" and not a salient feature of other "Yellow Hair" performances, R^{y}, is because her recent performance of "The Task" was still on her mind. Here again we see a hiatus in Martha's musical and textual realizations: the intonations more common to "The Task" did not occur to her until after she had sung its text. Her musical memory lagged behind her verbal recall, affecting songs during a recording session as well as parts of a song during a single performance, cf. "The Task," 1975, ex. 12.

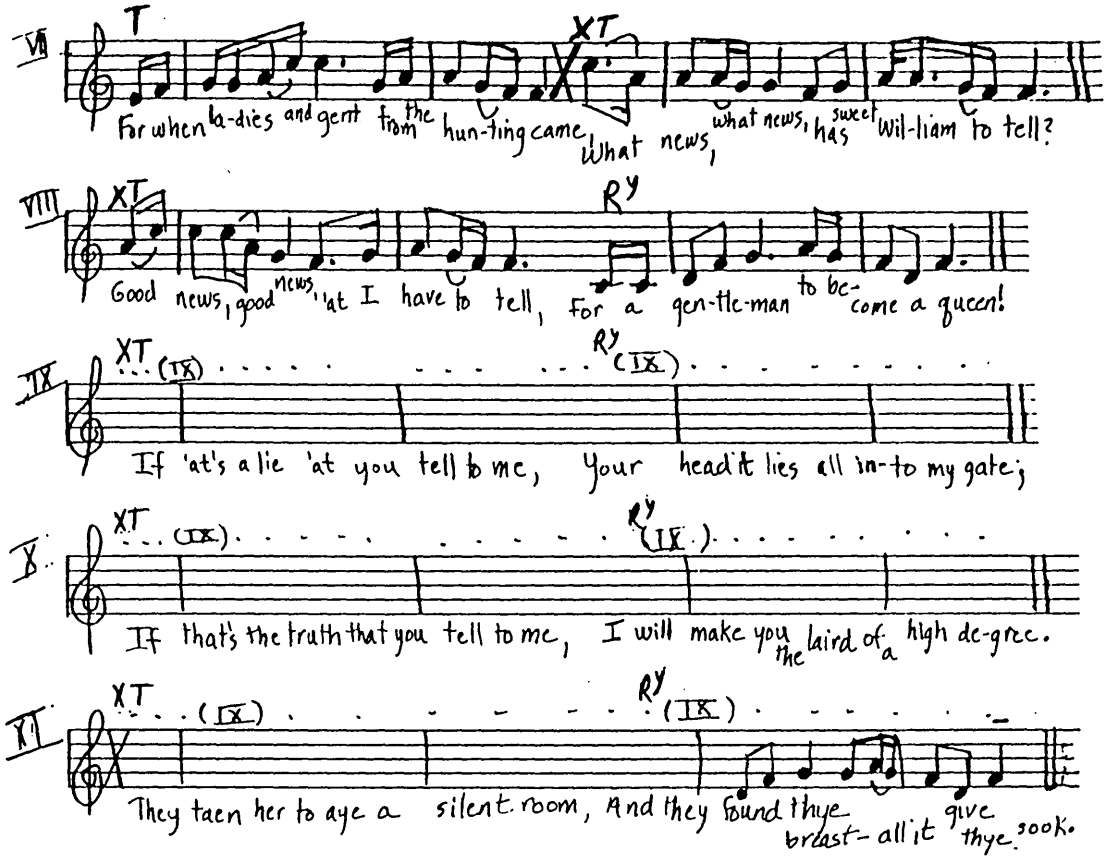
The most interesting aspect of this variable performance in 1977 is the singer's maintenance of the combination X R^{y} for strophes VII - XI, and then her changing this pattern to the combination YJ R^{y} for the balance of the song. See ex. 18. This is probably indicative of the singer's desire to call attention to the end of the story, the confrontation between the king and his new queen. YJ is certainly the most demanding intonation vocally in the set of intonations comprising the "Yellow Hair" melodic idea, so Martha must have been more full of energy at this point in the story — contrary to what we might have expected after her opting for the easier to sing T and XT in part two, with XT's falling pitch pattern.

The intonation YJ did not occur in other performance of "Yellow Hair" or "The Task," but it did occur in "Sir James the Rose" (CH 213), recorded once from Martha in 1957. Most interesting was its singular occurrence in that performance — at the climax of the narrative

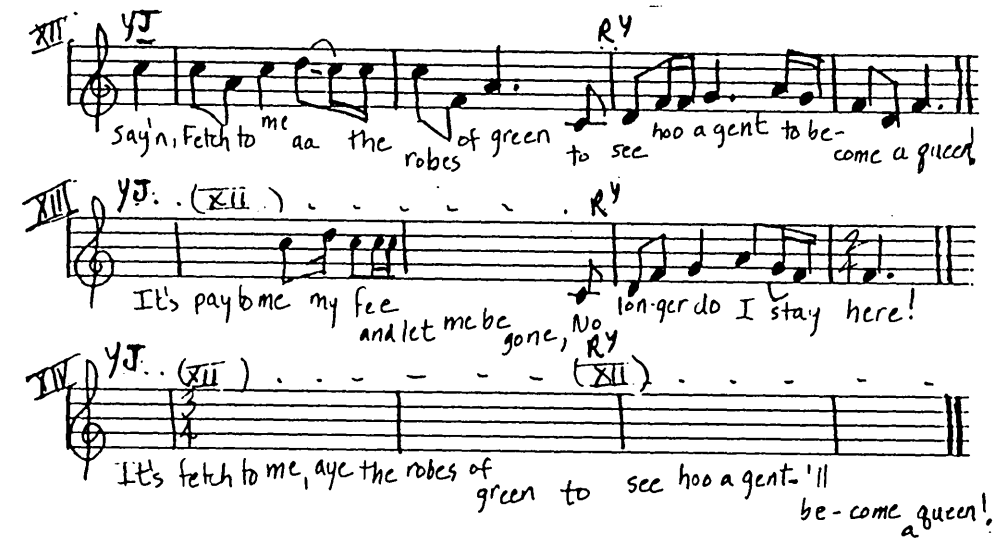
Example 18. Martha Johnstone, "I'll cut off my long Yellow Hair," 77/146/A2. Three parts of the story are delineated according to the singer's patterns of intonation combinations.



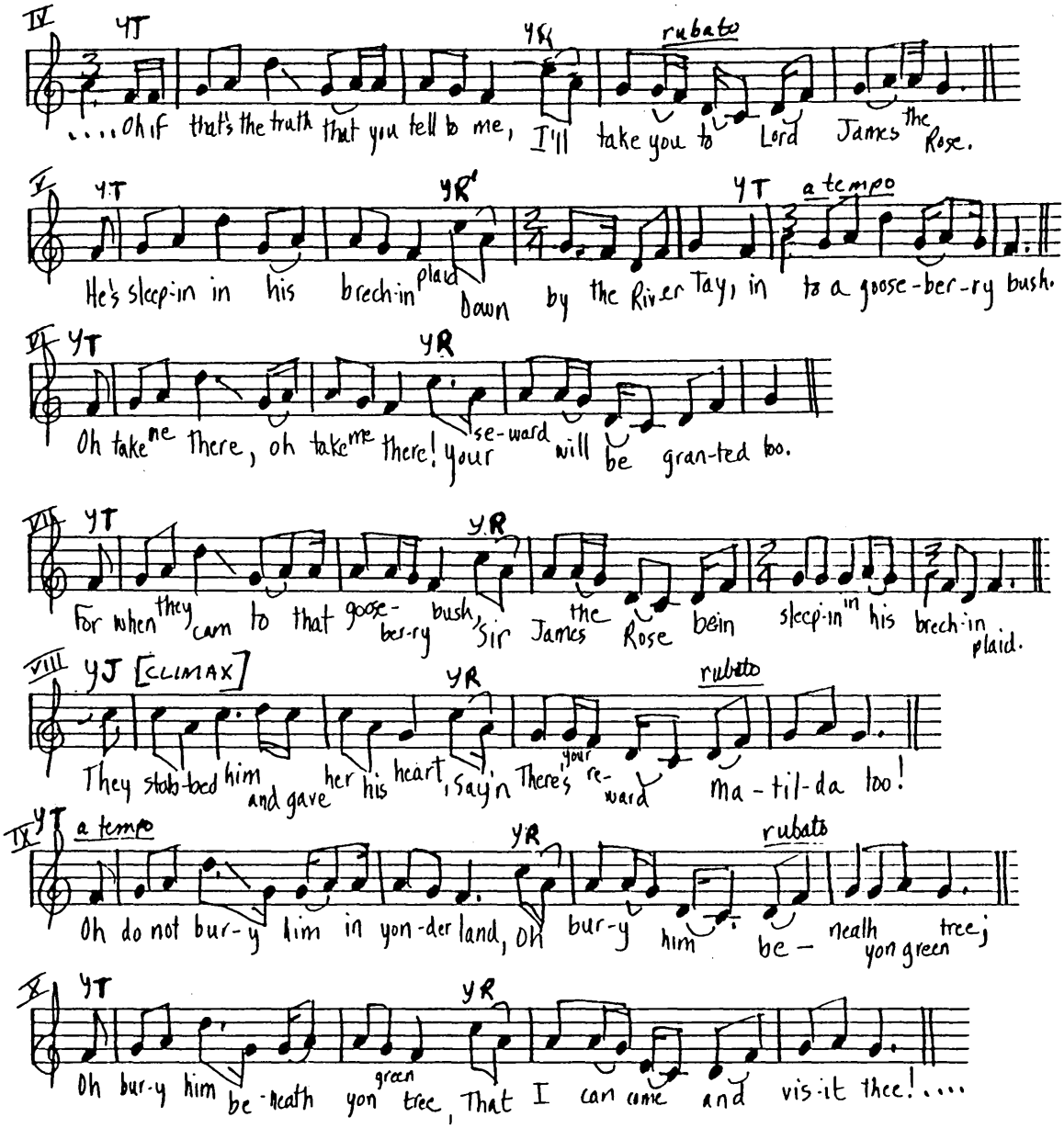
PART TWO



PART THREE



Example 18a. Martha Johnstone, "Sir James the Rose," 57/7; excerpt from the middle of the performance showing the occurrence of YJ at the climax of the story, VIII.



when Sir James was at last discovered by his pursuers; see the excerpt quoted in ex. 18a. "Sir James" was sung to the same standard strophe as was "Yellow Hair" on other occasions.

A few critical remarks about the 1977 performance of "Yellow Hair" should be made. The division in the transcription between VI and VII, the labeling of 'Part Two," does not mean the singer was deliberately structuring the story into acts or scenes. She was disturbed at the end of strophe V by her grandchildren, and this may have been the reason for the repetition of YR at VI. However, YR's total absence after VI is curious. Did she forget its particular contour and resort to the easier XT as the ending intonation of couplet VII? XT began similarly to YR, but it did not drop the octave at the end of its first motive; it only fell to the tonic — not requiring as much effort as the lower pitches of YR. Then, however, Martha began a new pattern, beginning her couplets with XT and ending them with R^y. R^y began an octave lower than YR and was easier to sing for Martha: she had pitched this performance high, by comparison with others she gave in the 1970s.

After repeating the combination, XT R^y, three times, Martha changed XT to YJ -- an intonation comprised of the highest pitch of the performance and the highest tessitura of any intonation in the "Yellow Hair" melodic complex. Five times the high dominant was reiterated in each of the phrase's three occurrences. Did this change to the intonation YJ signify anything?

Although Martha had been shy about singing this song for her traveller audience at the start of the performance, by strophe XII, part III of the transcription, she was very much involved in the

story. And so were her listeners, judging by Duncan Williamson's comment immediately following the song, "Very good, that's good, Peasie!" (78/109/A4) The story had been gathering momentum by strophe XII and Martha was well into her song, so she responded to this scene between the king and his new queen with the most resounding intonation in the "Yellow Hair" melodic complex. Martha no doubt sensed her audience's interest in and enjoyment of the story.

When Duncan Williamson requested "Yellow Hair" from Martha in 1977 she was hesitant to perform it because she did not think her traveller audience would want to hear an old song they already knew well, and perhaps better than she did. She had said, "I thought I heard him [Duncan] at it." (MJ, 78/109/A4) But when Duncan assured her he didn't know the song, and when the others in Martha's audience assured her they wanted to hear her singing it, she honoured their request and sang the story the best she could. "The tale's the thing!" (Lord, 1960, p. 68)

> Travellers are very inquisitive people .... They like a story that they could learn and tell tae somebody else that somebody else had never heard. They liked always tae tell a new story. They wantit to tell something new. .... And if she [Martha] thought that she was singing something I never heard, then she would give it more gusto and give it more theme, ye see what I mean. She would make it more better -- because I was hearing something I had never heard before.
>
> (DW 85/1/A2)

Plate 1. Traditional tales appeal to the younger generation of travellers. In a ceilidh (Montrose, 1978) listeners encircle the storyteller, Duncan Williamson.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

From the formal study of strophic variation in travellers' narrative singing, two modes of singing may be deduced: a) performing set melodies to memorized or re-created texts, and b) improvising on a variable melody to a memorized or a variable text. Among the travellers' society both modes are acceptable; but today the first is preferable, certainly by the majority of travellers who have been heard and recorded by non-travellers visiting them. In the repertoires of some narrative singers both modes of singing can be observed: but these travellers, Martha Johnstone, John MacDonald, Charlotte Higgins, Maggie McPhee and the English traveller Caroline Hughes, have all died since they were recorded and it is most likely that improvisation of narratives in song is now obsolete. While the subject is clearly a by-gone phenomenon, the details and evidence of ballad improvisation are on tape and the study should continue.

Martha Johnstone's practice of intoning narratives to variable phrases can be compared to the Danish ballad tradition of singing narratives to variable melodic ideas; and the concept of melodic idea can be compared to the "basic formulas" to which Icelandic rimur are chanted. (Nielsen, 1982) The melodic ideas to which Martha sang six of her thirty-four narrative songs can be used as evidence for the theory of "oral-formulaic" ballad singing, as proposed by Buchan in The Ballad and the Folk (1972). But his theory would have to be amended to account for the memorization of a ballad text

which can still be variable in sung performance as the singer interprets the essential story differently by varying the music or strophic structure.[1]

Why some narratives within a singer's ballad repertoire should be sung to variable melodies and others not; and why some performances of a narrative should be musically variable and other performances of the same narrative are not, are two important questions in the study of improvisation. What explanations are there for the case of Martha Johnstone who sang half of her narratives to set tunes and the other half to irregular strophes or variable melodies?

Martha was illiterate. One common factor in those singers who were recorded singing narratives to variable strophes within a single performance of a ballad was age — all were born around the turn of the century. As travellers they would have had very limited schooling, if any.[2] Could literacy or the lack of it have affected their performances of narratives to regular strophes or variable ones?

Lord, Buchan and Knudsen all concluded that illiteracy was primarily responsible for the multiformity of oral narrative because a non-literate person thinks and "sees" reality differently from a literate person:

> A written text was thus made of the words of song. .... a fixed text was established. .... Of course, the singer was not affected at all. He continued .... the tradition went on. Nor was his audience affected. They thought in his terms, in the terms of multiformity. But there was another world, of those who could read and write, of those who came to think of the written text not as the recording of a moment of the tradition, but as the song. This was to become the difference between the oral way of thought and the written way.
>
> (Lord, 1960, pp. 124-5)

> .... where the literate mind would use a straightforward linear arrangement .... the oral mind operates spatially. The oral poet does not share the print-oriented man's belief that the words are the story. For him [the oral poet] the story is a conceptual entity .... 'memorization' is a process quite antipathetic to the oral mind. Where literate, print-oriented man is 'visual,' nonliterate man is 'aural.'
>
> (Buchan, 1972, pp. 100, 158, 163, 165)

> The ballad as we know it follows absolutely the norms of oral tradition, the basis of which is illiteracy. .... The relationship between illiteracy and book-learning has a counterpart in the relationship between reality and abstraction: — Those who cannot read see the ballad unfold as pictures .... — Those who can read see the ballads before them as words, as abstractions.
>
> (Knudsen, 1976, pp. 60-61)

There is a presupposition in these conclusions about illiteracy: a literate person because he <u>can</u> read, <u>will not</u> respond to an oral tradition authentically. This is fundamentally untrue for the traveller, for the literate ballad singer who belongs to an oral tradition. Versions of narratives may indeed be memorized, word for word by ballad singers — those who can and can't read (and several elderly travellers I know who can sing fixed songs can not read). The important point is, the <u>sources</u> of these memorized ballads — for Duncan Williamson and Johnnie Whyte as well as for Martha Johnstone — were not books, but were oral texts i.e., literally oral, as performed by living travellers or tradition bearers.

I had not discussed with Martha concepts of visual or aural memory. And how visual or aural memory function in ballad performance are subjects for future research. But it is most interesting and not unrelated to the point, literate storytellers do indeed picture their narratives as they are telling them (cf. Williamson, 1982); and literate Gaelic informants of Donald-Archie MacDonald have testified

that their memories of narratives depend on their abilities to visualize them in tellings. (ARV, 1981, pp. 116 - 124) In short, it would seem that whether or not a narrator can read makes no big difference to his ability to memorize, his inclination to memorize or his visualization of pictures in oral performance.

The explanation for Martha's variability in some of her strophic narrative songs and regularity in others, must be sought elsewhere than in her lack of literacy.

Martha preferred some narratives to others; these achieved stability. I have argued against memory failure as the cause of variation in chapters three, four and five. But it is most certainly likely that some of Martha Johnstone's narratives had been heard more often by her than other narratives; and some narratives had been sung by her more regularly and frequently than others. Those she had performed often or with some regularity were the ones she sang with less strophic variability. Thus, "Lord Randal" (CH 12), "Yellow Hair" (CH 106), "Golden Vanity" (CH 286) and "Sailor's Return" (Laws N42) would have been sung consistently to standard strophes because these were the songs she preferred to sing when she had an audience.

How preferences are formed is a complex process, but audience reception, or the lack of it, is one determinant. Martha's performances of narratives to a standard strophe would have been favourably received by traveller listeners in the 1930s and 1940s who were enthusiastic supporters of the country and western song genre. These songs penetrated the travellers' society in the form of discs by Jimmy Rogers and Gene Autrey, and "Western cowboy songs" became the most popular en-

tertainment among the travellers' society when Martha was in her 30s. With the more "tuneful" cowboy songs the melodic variability of ballad singing could not compete. Singers of narratives in the 1930s and 1940s would have had to perform "tuneful" songs if they were to gain the appreciation of listeners, a majority of travellers, who were impressed by the new (to their society) American song idiom.

> She sung them [the songs with definitive tunes] really well, aye. She done really well some o the sangs. These were the ones that she had, I think, that she liked that she sung often. The ones that she sung often I think she knew better than the ones that she just haerd her auld folk singin and then just, eh, sung them noo and again.
>
> (DW, 83/73/B)

Preferences for songs are not necessarily fixed. The changing status of songs within the memory of a performer was a subject attended to by Roger Abrahams in his study of Almeda Riddle. He noted, "Each song does not occupy an equal place of importance in the repertoire." (1970, p. 155) Songs can be learned by a singer but may become "an inactive part of the repertoire" when they are not sung often or regularly. And Abrahams noted, "Asking for the song [that has 'drifted into the back of the memory'] may bring it back to the active part of a repertoire." (Idem., emphasis mine) This is surely the best way to understand Martha's improvised performances of "Breastbone" (CH 10) which progressed towards the regularity of a refrain ballad in later variants. It was a narrative sung on request between 1975 and 1978 when I visited Martha periodically; it wasn't sung in any of the six previous sessions in the 1950s and 1960s because it was probably dormant in Martha's memory.

The role of memory in a narrative singer's performances and why some songs are remembered, able to be recalled, while others have been forgotten and cannot be recalled, are issues relevant to the understan-

ding of a singer's processes of variation. Future research into performance may clarify the deeper psychological factors of memory.

But at least one narrative Martha improvised on five different occasions appeared to have never had a set tune. The variability of Child 2, a memorized text, in her repertoire cannot be explained away by irregular or infrequent performing. And some of the other narratives sung to set strophes, standard strophes, had variable passages which did not show evidence of ever having been sung, by Martha, to a fixed combination of phrases e.g., "Banks o Airderie-O's" first strophe, and the last strophes of "Queen Jean," "Lady o the Drum," and "Sailor's Return." These more or less variable narratives are evidence of a tradition of melodic variability or improvisation which could characterize a performance or part of a performance if a singer either didn't know a set formulation for all or part of a song, or gave first priority to the impulse of the story — imparting to narrative "the emotional content of music." (Knudsen, 67/1, p. 2)

"The auld traivellers had their ain style o singin things." According to the testimony of Duncan Williamson, Martha Johnstone's improvisations, her joining intonations together in variable combinations — A and B musical phrases could be alternated in one song on one occasion and on another occasion the same song could also be sung to A alone, or a different song might be sung to the same musical phrases in an ABBA form followed by strophic patterns of BABA and BBBA — this protean concept of tune was nothing extraordinary for an "auld person. She's on'y just another auld singer .... daein what she knew and what she heard." (DW, 83/73/A)

Thus, whether Martha sang a set tune or a variable melody or a mixture of both in some performances, probably depended on the way

she had heard the ballad performed. Very likely she heard both modes of singing to the same extent, and it is not inconceivable that singers she heard would have mixed the modes for particular narratives as they endeavoured to communicate the meanings of stories — "freeing" the strophic form for the climax, the denouement, the introduction or the ending of a story to increase its effect or spur the listener's interest in a particular part of a narrative. In MacColl's words, " .... it appeared that the main attention of our singers was on the story and the tune was .... allowed to go its own way." (1977, p. 19) What is remarkable in Martha's performances is her storytelling ability, how she could emphasize different parts of a memorized text on different occasions with melodic variability. Although other factors e.g., distraction from non-traveller listeners, musical problems defining a preferred sequence of intonations or lack of vocal energy to achieve pitch and range, also contributed to the inconsistent irregularities evident in diachronic performances of ballads, Child 106 and Child 286.

Between Improvisation and a Set Melody

The narrative repertoire of Duncan Williamson, including over forty ballads, has yet to be studied in detail. But the similarity of some features of his singing to Martha's melodic variability and improvisation is striking. In the first instance, Duncan also makes use of a melodic idea for several different ballads; he can sing different strophe variants of the "Lady Margaret" tune in one performance. He has a concept of "similiar" tunes which encompasses the comparative contours and modes of the standard strophes he sings for Child 37, Child 39 and Child 7. His own composition, "The Hawker's Lament" (ex. 2, Introduc-

tion) is sung to his "own" tune, but it too belongs to the "Lady Margaret" melodic idea; and so does the standard strophe of "Hind Horn" (CH 17, analyzed as a melodic variant of CH 39 in chapter three).

The difference between Duncan's melodic idea and Martha's is that the size of the strophe is fixed, always quadriphrasal in Duncan's variants of the "Lady Margaret" tune. For Martha, a melodic idea may be realized in one phrase, a biphrasal, a triphrasal, a five- or a six-phrase strophe. Also, Duncan appears to have only one melodic idea that he works with, whereas Martha had three. But, as I have stated above, a detailed study of Duncan's repertoire has yet to be made.

A second feature of Duncan's performances similar to Martha's performances is the inconsistency of irregularities in diachronic variants of ballads. Reduced strophes may or may not be present from one performance to the next of Child 188, expanded strophes may or may not be present in performances of "Hind Horn" and the refrain burden in Child 39 may or may not be sung in certain episodes. As with Martha, the presence or absence of irregularities is dependent upon the interpretation of the essential story for a particular audience. Duncan's first priority is to get the story through to his listener, to move his listener to experience the story as it had originally happened; then the story lives, is "kept alive" as the listener is brought into it. (See chapter two, p. 64; also my article, 1981, p. 71.)

At least half of Duncan's narratives belong to the "inactive" part of his repertoire, and it will be an exciting study for some future musicologist or student to discover these eighteen ballads and perhaps more — if they will be performed or not, how, why and when. It is noteworthy that

Duncan prefers rhyming quatrains and standard quadriphrasal tunes; he does not like the unrhymed songs — improvisations — of Martha Johnstone or the lack of rhyme in Bessie Whyte's verses of "Young Johnstone" (CH 88, Tangent TNGM 119/D). Thus it is highly unlikely that Duncan will re-create ballads with strophic variability, the formal characteristic of Martha's improvised ballads.

Unlike Martha, Duncan has had a very wide experience performing for travellers, taking every opportunity to perform and participate in campfire ceilidhs. Although he has been recently performing more for non-travellers and gaining public recognition, he still sings primarily for one reason — to keep the memories of his forbears intact:

> 'Will ye tell my wee story or sing my wee song when I'm gone,' that's what ma faither said to me. As long as you keep their stories and songs alive, they're not dead. That was the most important thing in the world.
>
> (DW, Interview, 2/85)

Whether or not Duncan's attitude changes as he continues to appear in public will be an interesting musicological study, but as his wife I am not in the best position to make an objective inquiry. A comparison of his earlier performances of narratives, before 1983 when he gained notoriety with his book, Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children, with more recent performances would make a fine dissertation topic! Will inconsistent irregularities become fixed or will Duncan retain a fluid concept of tune with the options of musical alternatives at the level of figures, motives and phrases — as Johnnie Whyte had?

Set Melodies

The ten recorded narratives of Johnnie Whyte were only a part of his repertoire; his sister-in-law Bessie told me she heard him singing other "old songs" but I never had the pleasure of hearing these — Johnnie died before I could ask him about them. It is probably true to conclude that Johnnie sang his favourites during the six recording sessions we had together with his friends and relations.

There is little in Johnnie's performances which can be compared to Martha's strophic variability. There was nothing improvisatory about his strophic forms — every song recorded featured a fixed text and a memorized tune. Only once did Johnnie have difficulty recalling the start of a tune, 76/213/A2; and he would not perform a song without a clear definition of the tune in mind from the start. Tunes were important to Johnnie and he discussed with me a concept of "proper air" (78/107/A2). Stories of his "long songs" were also important to him and he had definite interpretations of events in the narratives which were not always shared by his listeners, re. the arguments between him and his sister-in-law over Child 10 and Child 203, 76/213/A1 and 78/107/A5.

"Fighting" over differing versions of songs was not uncommon among traveller families, and Bryce Whyte explained, "They would argue [if a verse was missed out or a mistake made] and this is how they cam to ken the songs that well; they did that steady." (75/191/A4) This subject of travellers' criticism and the area of aesthetics is a large topic for research, and one I would hope will someday be studied in detail. Here it is sufficient to note that a critical tradition is very much part of a singer's definitions of versions, how they become fixed.

Why Johnnie's narratives were fixed to a much higher degree than half of Martha's is most easily explained by the fact that Johnnie performed regularly and fairly frequently at ceilidhs in his brother-in-law Bryce Whyte's house, and in houses of his other relatives in Montrose. (Johnnie, unlike Martha and Duncan, was "housed up" half his life, re. 76/213/B2.) Johnnie was a "good singer" and he was often requested to sing the "old songs" (see chapters one and two). With frequent and regular performing, and in basically the same performing circumstances year after year, a singer's narratives will "gel" (Henderson, 1980, p. 74). This is especially probable when a singer has not heard many different versions of songs and when he has learned his songs from a very limited number of source singers. Johnnie Whyte had very few sources; "From my mother and father, that's where I got all my old songs. And I got some from my Uncle Bryce. That's hoo I have all that old songs, is off my mother and my father." (75/106/A4 and 78/107/A2)

However, it was shown quite clearly in chapter three that even a fixed tune in performance is not static in structure. A set melody, known by a narrative singer, will have musical alternatives i.e., variants, built into it which the singer may or may not choose to realize — for a variety of reasons, including social circumstances of the performance which may affect pitch and tempo. The occurrence of variants in a performance may be simply determined by the singer's relaxed approach to a performance or the opposite, physical strain — when an uncomfortable pitch has been chosen to start the song. Other structural variants, at the level of the phrase e.g., in Johnnie's

"Dowie Dens" tune, were evidently chosen by the singer when he wished to convey a particularly meaningful part of the story for a select audience of close relatives. The choice of a variant, and two can be employed in one performance, for particular stanzas or episodes shows its function to be similar to that of melodic variability in the older style of ballad improvisation — it can be a response to the "impulse of the story" (Knudsen, 1967/1, p. 2).

The use of phrase-and motive-variants to communicate the meaning of episodes or events within a narrative coheres with the occurrence of strophe variants at crucial points in travellers' narratives — at dramatic climaxes or denouements. Irregularities may occur consistently in diachronic performances of individual songs. Three of Johnnie's memorized narratives and one in five of MacColl's published narratives (in his 1977 collection of travellers' songs) featured reduced or expanded strophes. Within the context of a regularly recurring standard strophe in performance, these irregular strophes have specific dramatic or narrative purposes. Reduced strophes, from quadriphrasal to biphrasal structures (usually the second half of a quadriphrasal strophe), occur either at points of greatest dramatic interest e.g., stressing the emotional confession of murder in Johnnie Whyte's "Young Emily" (GR 123), or at points of least dramatic interest e.g., when the two brothers ride to Dumfries Jail across the fast-flowing Annan water in Duncan Williamson's Child 188. Expanded strophes occurred in several travellers' narratives, in the majority of examples in penultimate stanzas or episodes — heightening the dramatic or narrative climaxes of their respective stories.

Refrain Omission in Traveller Balladry

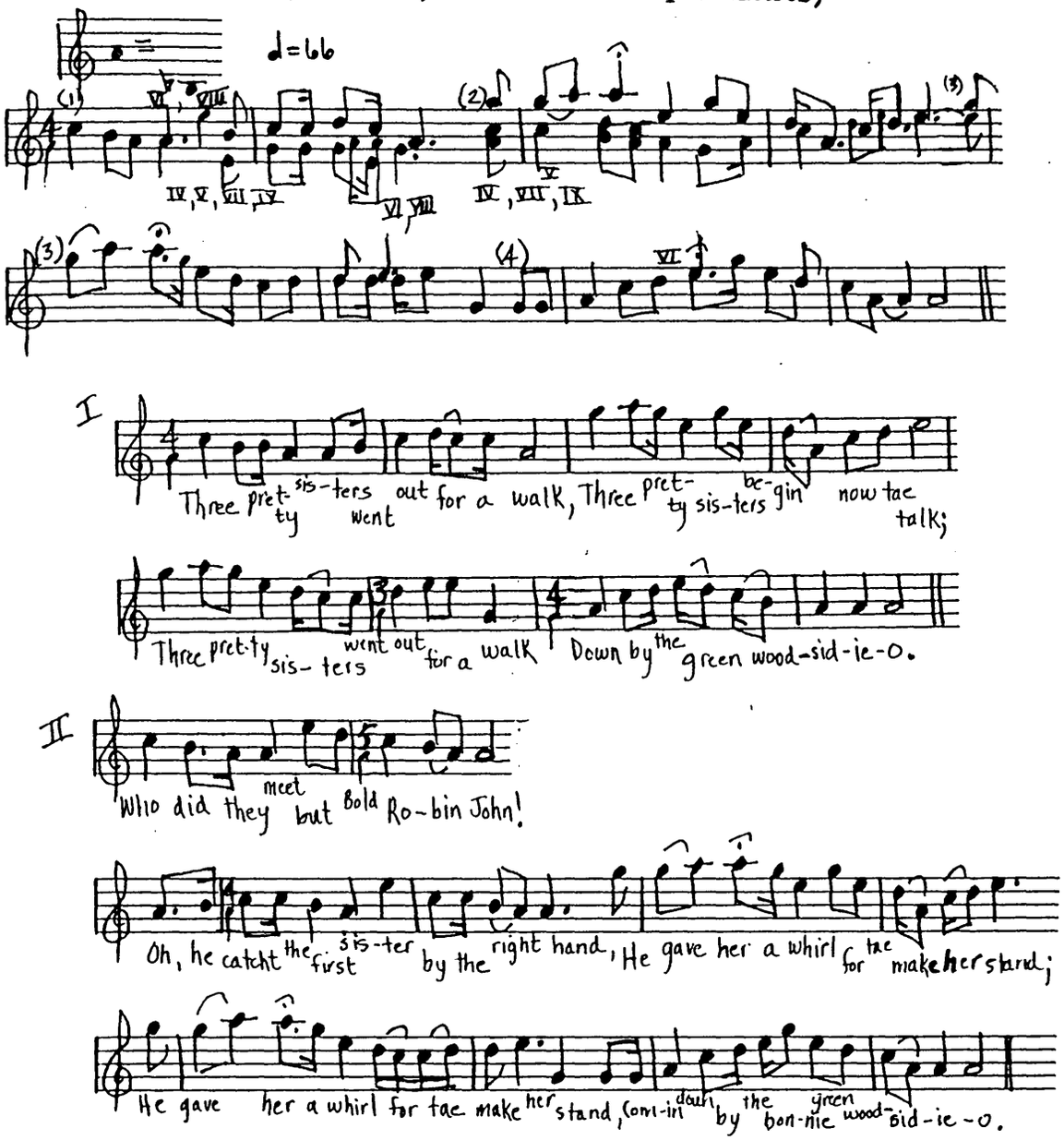
In chapter four on irregular strophes I distinguished a category of "refrain omission" because traveller singers John MacDonald, Duncan Williamson and Johnnie Whyte all had expressed dislike of the interlaced refrain form of some narratives they had performed. In John MacDonald's repertoire, "Lord Randal" and "Banks o Airderie-O" were ballads which featured less conventional strophic forms — by comparison with narratives in print. "Lord Randal" was triphrasal, without the usual refrain for line two of its stanzas, just like Martha Johnstone's "Banks o Airderie;" John's "Airdrie-O" was quadriphrasal but without the usual interlaced refrain — instead line two carried part of the narrative and it was repeated for line three. According to MacColl, this was a form "unprecedented in any of the printed texts." (1977, p. 61) Another example of the same form as John's text was Mary Williamson's "Three Pretty Sisters" CH 14), the same version of the narrative and the same tune as John's. See ex. 1.

The most interesting occurrence in this performance, in addition to the irregular strophe two which opened with an intonation composed of the first motive of A and the last motive of the refrain phrase, was the omission of the refrain in the last stanza; in its place was the brother's confession and then Mary repeated it, giving a five-line strophe to end the song which had been regularly quadriphrasal after II with a refrain line ending every stanza. The omission at the end was deliberate, just as Johnnie Whyte's omission of the refrain in the last verse of his "Swan Sweems sae Bonnie-O" (CH 10) was intentional (see ex. 12, chapter four). The function of the omis-

sion is to make the moral point of the story more effective, as in speaking the end or at the end of a long song; cf. sean-nos singing and my discussion, section two, chapter two. In chapter two I discussed the various reasons narrative singers have for mingling speech with singing in performances, and I think refrain omission is related to this practice, and the singer's desire to communicate the meaning of the story more effectively than he could otherwise do -- by continuing with the vocables of the refrain.

Example 1. Mary Williamson, "Three Pretty Sisters," 76/205/B1. CS

STANDARD STROPHE (from III, with melodic equivalents)



3 Will you be a rankin robber's wife,
Or will you die by my penknife?
Will you be a rankin robber's wife
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O?

4 I'll no be a rankin robber's wife,
Or I'll no die by your wee penknife;
I'll no be a rankin robber's wife
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O.

5 He catcht the second sister by the right hand,
He gave her a whirl for tae make her stand;
He gave her a whirl for tae make her stand
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O.

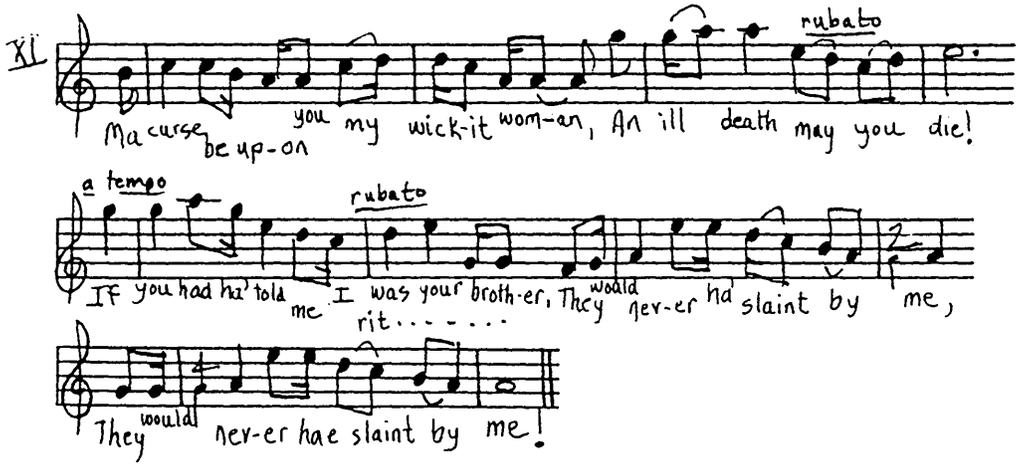
6 Will you be a rankin robber's wife,
Or will you die by my penknife?
Will you be a rankin robber's wife
Comin doun by the green wood-sidie-O?

7 I'll no be a rankin robber's wife,
Or I'll no die by your pen knife;
I'll no be a rankin robber's wife
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O.

8 He catcht the youngest sister by the right hand,
He gane her a whirl for tae make her stand;
He gane her a whirl for tae make her stand
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O.

9 Will you be a rankin robber's wife,
Or will you die by my penknife?
Will you be a rankin robber's wife
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O?

10 I'll no be a rankin robber's wife,
Or I'll no die by your penknife!
I'll no be a rankin robber's wife
Comin doun by the bonnie green wood-sidie-O!



With Duncan Williamson I have discussed the function of the interlaced refrain in ballads (see section two, chapter four), and his idea that refrains detract from the story would seem to be consistent with the evidence of refrain omission at climactic points in narrative performances, or during episodes when a covert meaning is not intended, cf. Duncan's performance of Child 39, ex. 11, chapter four.

Other narrative singers should be questioned about the refrains in ballads. I think this is a key subject for research into traveller balladry. Singers are quite willing to talk about refrains, from my experience interviewing them. Whether or not refrains are sung in performance makes a big difference to the form of strophes, the form of the tune and the structure of the text. And perhaps most importantly, when refrains are not sung how will listeners participate? Investigating the reasons in detail, why singers sing or don't sing refrains or refrain ballads, and examining more thoroughly refrain ballads as they have been performed, should provide very useful information about the tradition of traveller balladry. It is intriguing — there is no evidence that the ballads have ever been danced to by the travellers. They do dance to mouth music, and the connection between mouth music and nonlexical vocables in ballad refrains has been observed by Thorkild Knudsen:

> In the dance ballad the ballad singer accommodates the dancers. He extends the melody of the verse on his instrument with repetitions, insertions and transitional phrases which fit the 6 steps of the dance and which are especially an offering and a challenge to the dancers: they can give themselves over entirely to the dance and if they wish they can sing along. The effect is overwhelming.
>
> When the instrumentalist has gone the dancers, or anyone who can, must also sing the instrument's part if the ballad is to continue to be used as a dance ballad. Repetitions, insertions and transitions are now provided with lyrical outbursts

> or meaningless syllables and words — mouth music.
> Instrumental figures or intonations become vocal.
>
> (1976, p. 57)

"It's the same thing repeated aa the time .... and that's what I hate about it." (Johnnie Whyte, in and after performing Child 10, 77/139/B1) Why refrain repetition is dissatisfying to narrative singers in their performances of ballads is a question well worth asking. How do they think listeners respond to their repetitions, and how do listeners respond? Do they want to sing along, or do they want to listen to the story or to the singer, attending silently to the performance? Do they have any desire to dance? "Boring the listener" is a problem Duncan Williamson has felt regarding refrain ballads; but do narrative singers in general feel that "boring a listener" is something to be concerned about in performances of "long songs?"

> L — Now we .... don't seem to have so much time for dreary things — you get tired of listening to it, a long song.
>
> Bessie — <u>They</u> [my mother's generation] didnae. The story was actual, it really happened. These old ballads really happened. And this was tellin the story in song. They liked it! They would sit greetin, aw they would listen for hoors.
>
> (BW, 78/108/A2)

Moving a listener to feel the story has traditionally been the chief function of sung narrative. Whether or not singers will continue to perform stories with dramatic effect depends not a little on their attitudes towards songs — their forms.

The Travellers' Narrative Song Tradition

The two most important subjects to travellers themselves are children and ancestors, and it would not be appropriate to conclude the thesis on their narrative singing without a comment on the younger generation of travellers and the elderly.

Looking at the tradition of narrative song from the travellers' view, it is obvious that the first criterion for a healthy survival of that tradition would be reverence of the younger generation for their forbears -- love for the old folk inspires love for their old songs and stories and vice versa. What is the attitude of the youth?

In my eleven years of research among the travellers, in my eight years of living among the group, and based on what I have learned about the community from records and oral testimonies, I have seen and heard nothing to suggest that the younger generation of travellers revere their ancestors and the "auld yins" any less than the younger generations of the past did theirs. And care and love are reciprocated by the elderly for their children. Grandparents have always played an important role in child-rearing, and according to Mr and Mrs Whyte, "Looking after their [the youngest members of a traveller family] health, their manners and seein that they cam to nae hairm" are just as important to parents now as they were hundreds of years ago. (75/100/B3)

It is certain, strong family bonds permeate traveller society. But can traditional activities, such as singing and storytelling, survive on reverence alone? Would talking about songs and stories and revering them because they were "my granny's favourite songs" or "one of ma mither's" be enough to sustain a tradition? Are

memories sufficient to keep a tradition healthy and prosperous?

Music must be performed for enthusiastic listeners before it can continue as a tradition. The destiny of narrative song among the travellers is the same as its destiny among other communities with a valuable oral tradition: its life depends on performance! And without feedback from potential tradition-bearers, a singer of tales has no incentive to perform. Let us not forget what a wonderful tradition has evidently been lost — an older style of singing narratives with strophic and melodic variability. Why did this happen? The travellers preferred something else. Was the younger generation of travellers in Martha Johnstone's time, the 1930s - 1950s, to blame — might they have paid closer attention to the Marthas of their families, when they sang? Sympathetic audiences are essential to ballad singers; they need encouragement to sing their long songs with verve and dynamic expression, to complete them . . . carry on.

. . .

In truth, there's a lot more to the ballad tradition
than what I have studied. But in the end let us say,
"I have heard the mermaids singing each to each."

T. S. Eliot,
"Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Appendix A

NOTES

Introduction

[1]See James Porter, "The Turriff Family of Fetterangus," Folk Life 16 (1978), pp. 5 - 7. The main article on the subject is "Marriage and the Elementary Family" by F. Rehfisch in Scottish Studies 5 (1961), pp. 121 - 147.

[2]Exceptions are Renfrew and Lanark which are one composite traveller home area; and the Edinburgh-Lothian area comprising Mid-, East and West Lothians.

[3]The information was given during interviews in October 1983 and July 1984.

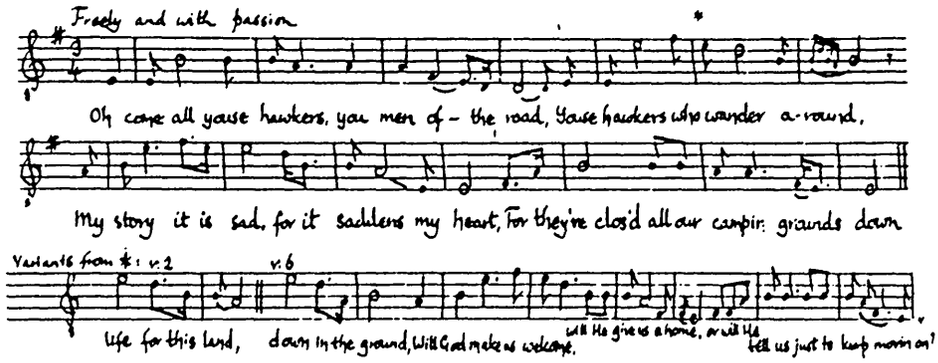
[4]See David Clement, "The Secret Languages of the Travelling People," Grazer Linguistische Studien XV: Sprachliche Sonderformen (Herbst, 1981), pp. 17 - 26.

[5]"Nancy's Whisky" on 75/126/A4 was sung by Cathie MacQueen with a Gaelic refrain. Cathie's parents spoke Gaelic. "Silly Jack and the Factor" (AT 1600) is well-known in Gaelic and a transcribed Scots version by Jeannie Robertson, 54/90/B15, has been published in Tocher 6 (1972), pp. 172 - 175. Duncan Williamson's repertoire of traditional traveller tales includes at least fourteen Gaelic stories told him by four Gaelic storyteller informants (non-travellers) before he left home in 1942 when he began travelling Lowland Scotland, the North-East and the Borders (less extensively).

[6]Also noted by Gentleman were strong links between travellers from the Isle of Lewis and Dingwall, and between those of Kintyre, Bute and Renfrew.

[7]"Hawker's Lament" is not a "protest song," according to Duncan, re. Interview, 3/85. But what other travellers who sing it think of it requires further research. Edith Townsley, aged 3, sang "The Hawker's Lament" along with her grandmother, Cissie Johnstone, aged 63, 76/221/B3. Duncan's tune for this song is a variant of the "Lady Margaret" standard strophe, cf. pp. 117-19, chapter three. As the text appears here is the way Duncan sang it during a ceilidh in the School of Scottish Studies, 79/19/8, transcribed in Tocher 33 (Spring 1980) by Alan Bruford, p. 188. This is the tune

as Duncan performed it in the 1979 ceilidh (transcribed by Alan Bruford):



Chapter One

[1]According to MacColl, " .... Betsy .... is tone-deaf .... never sings, cannot sing." (p. 20) But the concept of "tone-deaf" is ambiguous and riddled with presupposition about what is "proper" singing. It was wrong of MacColl to write that Betsy "never sings" for I recorded her singing four verses of the "Moss o Burre'dale" (MC 127) and four verses of "Sir Hugh" (CH 155) on my first visit to her and Mr MacDonald in August 1975 when they were staying with their youngest daughter and family in a farm field near Forfar. After singing "Sir Hugh" Betsy said, "That's all the verses of that song. I was a wee girl when I heard it; I've never heard it since; me, John [her husband] and his mother were the only ones who sang it." (75/98/A5)

[2]Peter Cooke has noted an equivalent category of "hoose fiddlers" in Shetland. "The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1983).

[3]The exact quotation made by Mr Gower was Fred Woods' reference to Jeannie Robertson as "the acknowledged Queen of traditional singers," in Folk Revival (Poole: Blandford Press, 1979), second page of photographic reproductions.

[4]"Tell a story, sing a sang .... " is a rhyme I first heard from Bessie Whyte on my first visit to her in December 1973. But I have heard the saying often amongst travellers in ceilidhs; it is directed to the person who is shy or embarassed about performing -- to remind them of the most important point; it's not how well or poorly one performs, but just that one does contribute something of one's own for the enjoyment of all.

[5]Funeral piping is not a custom exclusive to traveller society, but was also observed by other Scottish communities. Funeral piping is also not a universal tradition among travellers. If the deceased came from a family of pipers or a family which held piping to be a highly esteemed activity, then the oldest of the deceased's family or

the closest of kin to the deceased would request the best traveller piper known to play at the funeral. "Funeral piper" Willie McPhee (Perth) has testified that he does not pipe at funerals unless he is requested (Interview, 12/83).

[6]The word, céilidh, is derived from "céile " (companion) and it means "to give people companionship, to keep company." (David Clement, Interview, 8/84) Morag MacLeod, lecturer in Gaelic song in The School of Scottish Studies and author of "The Folk Revival in Gaelic Song," in A. Munro, The Folk Music Revival in Scotland (London: Kahn and Averill, 1984), pp. 191 - 204; has presented an excellent account of the original "ceilidh-house," a "feature of rural and island life" in her chapter on traditional Gaelic music. "A ceilidh" is defined as "topical discussions, story-telling, singing, reciting poetry," and these activities took place "as long as the household was hospitable ...." (p. 195)

[7]Duncan Williamson has made this point on several occasions and it is a maxim of travellers' oral tradition. See Barbara McDermitt's feature article on Duncan in Tocher 33 (Spring 1980, pp. 141 - 148) and Linda Williamson's article, stressing the paramount love and generosity which pervade the traveller's act of storytelling — a tradition which shares the same purport as does singing for the travellers — "What Storytelling Means to a Traveller," ARV (1981), pp. 69 - 76.

[8]The reason the Kintyre travelling families did not travel north of Lochgilphead was "for fear of being 'burkit,'" (being murdered and having their bodies snatched by burkers for medical research in Edinburgh). For an explanation of burkers and the travellers' fear of them, see Duncan Williamson's story, "The Boy and the Boots" and the prologue to it in his first collection of traditional tales, Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983), pp. 127-135.

[9]Lizzie Higgins has testified she "is convinced that all her ornamentation has been strongly influenced by bagpipe music and in particular by the playing of her father, the piper Donald Higgins, whom she has listened to from her earliest years." Quoted in Munro, 1970, p. 156. Ailie Munro has made a lengthly examination of Lizzie's ornamentation and singing style in her article on the ten Child Ballads Lizzie had learned from her mother, Jeannie Robertson. See "Lizzie Higgins ....," Scottish Studies 14 (1970/2), pp. 155 - 188. Both Nellie Stewart's father and husband, Tommie Stewart of Chuttan Hill, were fine pipers. Piping is an important tradition in Nellie's own family — both her son James and grandson Maxwell have studied seriously, with well-known teacher Annie Brown of Banchory, and competed in local Highland games. There is little doubt that Nellie also imitates the sound of the pipes when she sings ballads, although I have not recorded any testimonies from her about the consciousness of her singing style. See example 3 and plates 4 and 5.

[10]Thus Martha did not learn songs or narratives from other travellers, other than her own parents, grandparents, great-grandfather and some from her husband and his family. See Appendix C.

Chapter Two

[1]For further information see Munro, 1984, pp. 217 - 218.

[2]Porter's study was of three singers in the Turriff family of Fetterangus and the relationship between a traveller's repertoire of songs and her nontraveller husband's. Jane Turriff's mother was the third singer studied. See "Turriff Family .... Creation and Re-creation," Folk Life 16 (1978), pp. 5 - 25 and especially p. 21 on the formulaic structure of lyric songs.

[3]"The Broonie of Torquil Glen" will be published in 1985 by Canongate, Edinburgh, as part of a collection of silkie stories narrated by Duncan Williamson. Contextual discussion of the storyteller's source and the related ballad version will be included in the publication.

[4]The educational purport of the travellers' oral narratives is described in detail by Duncan Williamson in his Introduction to Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983), pp. 17 - 20.

[5]Sheila Douglas in her paper, "The Ballad on the Scottish Folk Scene," presented at the Ballad Conference in Sheffield (July 1982), referred to "coniach," a word used by "some of the older traveller singers" to describe a quality of singing in performance — the singer's emotional involvement in their songs. "Coniach .... certainly has to do with the power to move the listener." (p. 8)

[6]An interview with Duncan on the meaning of storytelling to a traveller, and its overpowering effect on his father when he told some of his father's tales, was published by me in ARV 37 (1981), pp. 69 - 76. See especially pp. 73-74 on the narrators' crying.

[7]"Castle Gordon" (cf. CH 237) is another song recorded from travellers that has little narrative content, and its status as a story in the travellers' tradition is puzzling. In a letter (Aug 1984) Hamish Henderson wrote me, "It always seemed curious to me that certain ballads — e.g., "Castle Gordon" — had become highly concentrated 'singers' digests' with the travellers — so that the action was concentrated into one highly dramatic moment."

[8]These two performances have been published in Tocher 20, pp. 138 - 140; and in MacColl, 1977, pp. 48 - 49 respectively. See excerpts, ex. 16, pp. 245-6.

[9]Hamish Henderson has ventured this theory in "The Ballad, the Folk and the Oral Tradition," The People's Past, ed. E.J. Cowan (Edinburgh: E.U.S.P.B., 1980), p. 106.

[10]My copy of the Child ballads (Dover reprint, 1965) and Bronson's Traditional Tunes and Singing Tradition have been at Duncan's disposal sing 1976. Although Duncan enjoys reading about the international versions of ballad stories in Child, he has said about the ballads published therein (and also about the ballads in Bronson and the more recently published Greig-Duncan collection (Aberdeen, 1983)),"They don't get through to you." Between an old song he has heard sung and its form on paper in a book, the correspondence is for him practically nil.

[11]This song was published in Tocher 19, recorded from the Clachan Townsleys, 75/43/B13, and identified as a version of CH 248. Hugh Shields has argued that there is no element of a treacherous cock in the story and therefore the song should not be classified as a version of the Child ballad, re. "The Dead Lover's Return in Modern English Ballad Tradition," Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung (1972), pp. 98 - 114. But the travellers do consider it a narrative and tell it as a ghost story, re. 75/43/B13. They have arguments about the ghost's motive for returning, 75/102/B6; and Duncan Williamson calls it "a ballad" (Interview 2/83) because it is a story.

[12]It could be argued that solo singing would be an unlikely occurrence in this household, the members living in such cramped quarters, a school bus converted into a kitchen and sleeping area. But of the forty different songs recorded on two visits in 1975, twenty were sung solo — about half by Sandy, John's brother, who sang mostly pop and country western songs. Isabelle sang two Irish songs solo and John sang three travellers' songs. Marion sang two rakes' songs solo.

Chapter Three

[1]The age of listeners is a primary factor in a narrator's decision to sing or tell a story. Duncan Williamson has explained the following: "Whether a song gets told or sung depends on the audience. If the audience is a group of elderly folk, 50 - 70 years of age, they will enjoy hearing his story as a song. Because these folk are already rich in stories by virtue of their age. They'll listen to a good song, their voices are old and a good voice reminds them of their younger days. They will appreciate a sung story because they probably heard it as a story but had not probably heard it sung. If the audience is a middle-aged group, 25 - 45 years of age, he'll first tell part of the story and then sing some of it, because the easiest way to get their attention is by telling a part of the story." This information was part of a paper I read to postgraduates and members of staff in the School of Scottish Studies in Nov. 1977.

[2]I gave Bessie Whyte a set of the Child ballads as a gift in 1976, a copy of the Dover reprint edition, 1965. Bessie's 1975 performance of the ballad is included in a feature article I wrote on her for Tocher 23 (autumn 1976).

[3]On 29 August 1984 I interviewed Duncan on the everyday work of his father and mother, how they supported the family on an everyday basis. He explained during the course of the interview that excessive drinking was not common among the travellers as a group until c. 1960s when they began making large(r) sums of money and could afford to buy alcoholic beverage. In particular, as children of large families grew up and could help with the family income, drinking became a more frequent activity.

[4]But I have heard travellers singing different songs simultaneously as they travelled together in a van. Also, Duncan Williamson has talked about travellers singing different versions of one song together — sometimes episodes did not synchronize but this did not interfere with their enjoyment of the "harmonious" performance, the fun of singing together.

[5]The "gel" concept of singers' versions of ballads is discussed by Hamish Henderson in "The Ballad, the Folk and the Oral Tradition" in Cowan, 1980, pp. 74, 86.

[6]This improvised performance is shown in part in Tocher 33 (spring 1980), pp. 157 - 159. But unfortunately, the editor, Alan Bruford, collated it with an earlier performance of Duncan's, 76/48/B3, five verses of which were substituted in the transcription.

[7]The article is included in Bronson, The Ballad as Song (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 144 - 161.

Chapter Four

[1]The subject of "tonality" in travellers' songs is more complex than I have indicated here. My term "kinetic energy" is borrowed from Leo Stein's glossary in Structure and Style: The Study and Analysis of Musical Forms (Illinois: Summy-Birchard, 1962), p. 237, "kinetic quality."

[2]According to Buchan, "The Sound of the Ballads," in The Ballad and the Folk (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); "Normally a stanza contains two essential ideas .... To carry the essential ideas he [the oral poet] uses non-rhyming lines one and three ....," pp. 147, 150.

Chapter Five

[1]"Strophe," The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, revised 3rd ed., 2 vols., ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), II, p. 2156.

[2]Suicide is not a topic I have researched among the travellers, but I have listened to the subject as it was discussed by a few members of different families who were relatives of suicide victims. The general attitude is that the act of taking one's life is "a sin in the eyes of God," just as it is "a sin" to take the life of any living creature — the tiniest insects are treated with respect by travellers — and they often talk about this "respect for life."

[3]"The Beggarman came ower the Lea" (CH 279) is a popular ballad among the Scots travellers. Maggie McPhee's version in MacColl's Travellers' Songs (1977, p. 105) is typical of the usual text sung, but her tune is not the one I have heard most often and not the one Martha was attracted to while singing "Breastbone." The refrain phrase of III in her 1977 performance and the phrase at IV(2) can be traced to the refrain of "The Beggar Man" as was sung by James Greig for Gavin Greig's Folk-Music collection in Aberdeenshire, 1910; re. The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection, 8 vols., ed. P. Shuldham-Shaw and E. Lyle (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), II, p. 311, J.

Martha's incorporation of phrases from different songs was not atypical of travellers' performances recorded by MacColl. He wrote about the "free association" his traveller informants were wont to do when singing songs: " .... a singer may dart with bewildering ease from one song to another — without stopping singing. .... Mrs Hughes, in 'The Famous Flower of Serving Men' (CH 106), uses focal points in the plot to swing from one ballad to another and back again — without stopping singing." (1977, pp. 24, 82 - 6)

[4]Evald Tang Kristensen was described by Thorkild Knudsen as "our [Denmark's] greatest folklore collector" in "DFS Information" (Dansk Folkemindesamling, 1967/1), p. 5. Later, in "Editorial Principles and the Compositional System of the Melodies," the introduction to Danmarks gamle Folkeviser, 12 vols. (Copenhagen, 1863 - 1976), XI, 1976; Knudsen contrasted Kristensen with the ballad collector, Svend Grundtvig, pp. 41 - 44. Grundtvig was spokesman of Denmark's "educated culture," while Kristensen was spokesman of the "popular culture," specifically the "poor people of the heath." (p. 44) Sidsel Jensdatter was Kristensen's "first important ballad informant." (Knudsen, 1967/1, p. 5)

[5]Martha Johnstone's singing of "The Task" in 1955 was transcribed and published by Henderson and Collinson in Scottish Studies IX/1 (1965), pp. 6 - 8. My transcription differs from Collinson's because I do not try to reproduce nuances in the singer's metre. If the metre is comprehended as a plastic discipline for the singer's text, then there is no major problem finding regularity in the strophes

There is basically one metre, duple, but the length of the second beat may be prolonged, ♩ ♩. . The short foot of the textual iamb, generally half a beat, may also be lengthened to a full beat, giving rise to an occasional triple metre measure.

Chapter Six

[1]Flemming G. Andersen and Thomas Pettit in their article, "Mrs Brown of Falkland: A Singer of Tales? Journal of American Folklore 32 (1979), pp. 1 - 24; have presented an "entirely negative study" of Mrs Brown's ability to re-create ballad stories. (p. 23) They have analyzed some passages in Mrs Brown's texts as "improvisatory" but they conclude that she had memorized the songs as fixed texts and the improvisations were due to "lapses of memory" (p. 19) or "the impact of extraneous circumstances which disturbed Mrs Brown's normal transmission mechanisms." (p. 20) Andersen and Pettit have pointed out paradoxes and inconsistencies in Buchan's "oral-formulaic" thesis, but I think all three scholars are only working with half of Mrs Brown's performances . . . the other half was the music — its structure would provide the necessary evidence for a positive appraisal of both theories, oral-formulaic and memorization, which could very well be applicable to the Brown corpus. What is needed is a new theory which can accommodate both re-creation and memorization — music is the key.

[2]The schooling of travellers at the time of World War I is discussed by Duncan Williamson in the Introduction to Fireside Tales (Canongate, 1983), pp. 14 - 15. Literacy was not important to the travellers in the early decades of this century. "No-one cared if the children weren't in school, for they were helping their fathers and mothers. That's all the education they needed — to learn how to survive." (Williamson, 1983, p. 15)

Appendix B

LIST OF INFORMANTS

Each entry includes the informant's name, birth, father and mother, relationship to others in the list and number of children when the details are known. The informant's travels or address at the time of recording is also given. For the eight main informants, narrative songs they recorded are itemized. Informants' occupations are not given because none engaged in single trades; rather, they all worked at a variety of jobs on an occasional basis — hawking, dealing, agricultural labour, whelk gathering, some piping, singing and story-telling.

Higgins, Jock. Born c. 1910, Skye. Father, Isaac Higgins; mother, sister to Alec Stewart's father, Blairgowrie. In 8/75 was staying at 5 Cargill Pl., Blairgowrie. Also informant to Ewan MacColl.

Hughes, Jimmie. Born 1916, Paisley. Father, non-traveller Bill Hughes; mother, née Garry. 11 children. Was reared in Islay. Recorded at Marshall's Green, Blairgowrie, 8/75; and in caravan near Ardrishaig, 5/76. Narrative repertoire includes versions of CH 114, CH 199, CH 214, CH 279 and CH 280; "Banks o Cladich," "Kevin Barry," and "Bonnie Bunch o Roses."

Johnstone, Mrs Katie Townsley. Born May 1912. Father, Sandy Townsley (Blairgowrie); mother, Mary Johnstone (Pitlochry). Older sister to Bessie Whyte (Montrose). Resident at 83a Christie's Lane, Montrose, 1974 - 1983.

Johnstone, Mrs Cissie Burke Johnstone Brown (prefers her father's surname). Born c. 1913, Dundee. Father, Hendry Johnstone (Pitlochry); mother's surname, Townsley (Angus). Full cousin to

Bessie Whyte; 2nd cousin to Duncan Williamson. 11 children. Travels length and breadth of Scotland with sons and daughters. Recorded in camps near Cupar, 11 and 12/76.

Johnstone, Mrs Martha Johnstone Reid (preferred second husband's surname). 1901 - 1980. Father, Sandy "Green Hen" Johnstone (Killin); mother, Katie Whyte (Aberdeenshire). Full biographical details in Appendix C. At time of death resident at 60 George Street, Coupar Angus where I recorded her on four visits. Narrative repertoire included versions of the following Child ballads — 2, 3, 7, 10, 12, 14, 23, 52, 57, 84, 106, 170, 199, 200, 203, 213, 214, 232 (appendix), 233, 236, 243, 275, 286; also traditional narratives, Laws K12, Laws L4, Laws N42, Laws 035 and Laws Q20; and lesser known (internationally) MC 76, MC 99, GD 22, "Young Densmore," "Lord Uillin's Daughter" and "The Tailor and the Plouman."

Johnstone, Mrs Rachel Williamson. Born Pitlochry. Father, Sandy Williamson; mother, Katie Johnstone. Full cousin to both Bessie Whyte and Duncan Williamson; sister to Cathie MacQueen, below. In 9/75 was living on The Manse, Kenmore. Widowed c. 1980.

MacDonald, Mrs Betsy. Born c. 1911. Father and mother were Argyllshire MacDonalds. Wife to John MacDonald, below, but widowed in 1978. 11 children. Since death of John has been staying with youngest daughter Mary Johnstone and family who are frequently on the move in their caravan, staying on farms in Fife and Perthshire.

MacDonald, John. Born Tarbert, 1916; d. 1978. Father, John MacDonald of Tarbert, Loch Fyne; mother, Maggie MacDonald (Argyllshire). 11 children. Travelled mostly Perthshire and Lanarkshire. Was recorded in a farm field 3 miles n.e. of Forfar in 8/75 and in Airdrie site, Lanarkshire in 3/76. Narrative repertoire included CH 2, CH 12, CH 14, CH 214; also traditional

narratives Laws M11 and Laws P27; and lesser known (internationally) MC 72, MC 88 and MC 97. Informant of Ewan MacColl also.

MacDonald, Mrs Nanny Stewart. Born c. 1942. Father, Tommie Stewart (Chuttan Hill); mother, Nellie MacDonald Stewart, below. Was residing in Christie's Lane, Montrose in 8/75.

MacKenzie, Martha "Mattie". Born c. 1920. Father, Sandy MacKenzie (Perthshire); mother, Betsy MacDonald (Perthshire). Stays permanently with brothers Johnnie and Jimmie. In 9/75 was camped in a barricade near Keltneyburn, Perthshire.

McPhee, Mrs Isa Townsley. Born c. 1936. Father, Sandy "Sapps" Townsley (Campbeltown); mother, Katie MacDonald, Argyllshire. Second cousin to Duncan Williamson. Travels regular circuit around Renfrewshire. Was working at potato howking in 9/75 at Hally's Farm, Crieff, Perthshire.

MacQueen, Mrs Logie Whyte. 1907 - 1981. Father, Jock Whyte (Aberdeenshire); mother, Jean McLaren (Stirling). Sister to Bryce and Johnnie Whyte, below. 7 children. Before death was resident at 9, Shore Wynd, Montrose.

MacQueen, Mrs Cathie Williamson. Born 1930, Argyllshire. Father, Sandy Williamson; mother, Katie Johnstone (Pitlochry). Sister to Rachel Johnstone, above; full cousin to both Bessie Whyte and Duncan Williamson. Cathie and husband Jock own the pony-trekking stables, Pitlochry, where they stay.

MacQueen, Harry. Born 1958. Oldest son to Jock and Cathie, supra.

Reid, Alexander "Shells." Born 1922, Kennoway, Fife. Father, Sandy Reid (Perthshire); mother, Martha Johnstone, above. In 1975 and 1976 was living on Burnside Road, Pitlochry; has since moved to Perth. Died June 1985.

Reid, Mrs Jean Johnstone. Born 1924, near Dunkeld. Father, Davie Johnstone (Killin); mother, Nellie McPhee (Argyllshire). Wife to Sandy Reid, supra. 9 children. Resided with husband at Burnside Cottage, Pitlochry in 1975 and 1976 but may be separated from him now.

Stewart, Douglas. Related to Inverness and Highland Stewarts. At time of recording was visiting Bryce Whyte, Montrose; then living at 112 Sheddocksley Drive, Aberdeen (1/1/76).

Stewart, Maggie. Born c. 1910. Aberdeenshire traveller. Was living at 8 Lowsan Avenue, Forfar in 11/75. Informant to Hamish Henderson as well.

Stewart, Mrs Nellie MacDonald. 1910 - 1985. Father, MacDonald; mother, Newlands (Aberdeenshire). Mother to Nanny MacDonald, supra. 5 children. Travelled mostly Aberdeenshire but resident at Pine Cottage, Black Hall, Banchory, Kincardine until her death. Narrative repertoire included Child ballads: 11, 12, 114, 210, 226, 236; also Laws 035 and lesser known (internationally) "Jimmie Foyers" (MC 84), "Sonny Hard" and GD 92.

Stewart, Mrs Roberta Watt. Born 1943. Father, Banff traveller; mother, ? Daughter-in-law to Nellie Stewart, above. Was visiting Nellie and Tommie Stewart for a ceilidh in 8/75; then living in Banff.

Townsley, Mrs Isa Williamson. Born 1956. Father, Jock Williamson (Lochgilphead), below; mother, Mary Townsley Williamson, below. Niece to Duncan Williamson. Present address is Hunter's Crescent, Perth.

Townsley, John "Clachan Jake." Born c. 1934. Father, Duncan Townsley (Kintyre); mother, Bella Williamson (Kintyre). Sister to Mary Williamson, below. 4 children. Used to travel Perthshire and

Inverness-shire; was living in abandoned school bus on Corran Farm, Clachan, Kintyre in 2/75; now housed in council house, Clachan.

Townsley, Mrs Isabelle Townsley. Born,? Father, Sandy Townsley (Kintyre); mother, Rachel Townsley (Kintyre). Second cousin to Duncan Williamson; wife to John, above. 4 children.

Townsley, Marion. Born 1959. Daughter (oldest) to Isabelle and John above.

Townsley, Robbie. Born 1912. Father, Sandy Townsley (Kintyre); mother, Katie MacCallum (Stirling). Was recorded in my home during a two-week extended visit, 10/82; now staying in a home for the elderly, Stirling.

Turriff, Mrs Jane Stewart. Born c. 1925. Father,? Mother, Tina Stewart (Aberdeen). Had travelled Deeside, Lumphanan, Keith, Bakenside; at time of 1975 recording was resident in Fetterangus; now lives in Mintlaw, Aberdeenshire. Remarried in 1975. Informant of Hamish Henderson and James Porter.

Whyte, Bryce. Born 1914. Father, Jock Whyte (Aberdeenshire); mother, Jean McLaren (Stirling). Brother to Johnnie, below. Resides at 66 South Esk St., Montrose.

Whyte, Mrs Bessie Townsley. Born 11/1919 near Dunkeld. Father and mother same as Katie Johnstone, above. Wife to Bryce, above. 4 children. Used to travel Perthshire and Angus mostly; now housed in Montrose. Narrative repertoire includes CH 7 (fragment), CH 88, CH 203, CH 210 (fragment), CH 214, CH 226, CH 232 (appendix), CH 210 (fragment), CH 274, CH 275; GD 84, and "Lord Uillin's Daughter."

Whyte, Johnnie. Born Aberdeenshire; 1910 - 1984. Father and mother same as Bryce Whyte's above. Had travelled mostly Perthshire

and Angus. Second half of life housed in Montrose area. Narrative repertoire included CH 3, CH 10, CH 199, CH 203, CH 214, Laws 035, Laws K43, GR 123 and "John Barbro" (CH 100).

Williamson, Alec. 1923 - 1984. Father, Willie "Old Duffy" Williamsong; mother, Sarah Williamson. Originally from Ross-shire, but was staying on Heathery Knowe caravan site, Coatbridge in 3/76.

Williamson, Duncan. Born 4/28, Furnace, Argyll. Father, Jock Williamson (Argyllshire); mother, Betsy Townsley (Argyllshire). See Appendix C for fuller biographical details. 9 children. Travelled Perthshire, Aberdeenshire, Fife, Ayrshire. Present address Kincraigie Farm Cottage, Strathmiglo, Fife. Narrative repertoire includes following Child ballads: 17, 20, 37, 39, 58, 114, 170, 188, 210, 243 (fragment), 274, 277, 281, 286 (two versions); also traditional narratives Laws J5, Laws Q13, Laws Q20, Laws N39, Laws N42 and Laws P20; and lesser known MC 88, and MC 97. Duncan also sings "John Barleycorn" which he considers a "story in song," a fragment of "Kevin Barry," "Lord Uillin's Daughter," "The Tramp and the Farmer" and "Lord Thomas and Lady Grey."

Williamson, Jock. Born 1/1917. Father and mother same as Duncan's, above. Travelled the same shires as brother Duncan. Now housed in a cottage on Duncholgan Travellers' Site, Lochgilphead but is regrettably in hospital frequently for bronchitis and related problems.

Williamson, Mrs Mary Townsley. Born c. 1919. Father and mother same as John "Clachan Jake's" above. Wife to Jock, above. 7 children. Narrative repertoire includes CH 7, CH 14, CH 170, Laws N42 and Laws Q20.

Williamson, "Red Willie". Born c. 1960. Father, Sandy Williamson (Stanley); mother, Betsy Townsley (Tarbert, Loch Fyne). Nephew to Jock and Duncan Williamson, above. 2 children to Martha

granddaughter of Martha Johnstone, above. Housed at 16B Hunter's Crescent, Perth. Mother Betsy has many narratives not yet recorded; she is one of Duncan Williamson's source singers, see Appendix C.

Appendix C

THE ORAL SOURCES OF MARTHA JOHNSTONE'S AND DUNCAN WILLIAMSON'S NARRATIVE SONGS

Martha Johnstone's Oral Sources

After singing "Queen Jean" (CH 170), "The Task" (CH 2), "Banks o Airdrie" (CH 14) and "Sir James the Rose" (CH 213) for Hamish Henderson, and having each time been asked by Hamish to identify the original singer; in the last instance Martha revealed her awareness of a song category: "Oh, I — it was, it was, ye ken, it was the auld auld folk that I heard at these. Ye ken, they're so old, ye see, an-an-and I just mind o them!" (57/7) Later that night in March 1957, after having sung the "Golden Vanity" (CH 286), "King William" (CH 7) and the "Road to Castle Gordon" (fragment from CH 237), she explained the provenance of the material, "Well, it was the auld yins that I heard at that ["Gordon"] tae. I never heard any o the young yins singing these, ye ken." (57/8) The "older peoples" (55/48) from whom Martha said she had learned the fairy abduction song, "Oh Nancy, a Fairy Queen Stole me away" (not a fragment of CH 39), recorded first in 1955, was the older generation of her own people, the Scottish travellers.

That "these songs," referred to in 1957, synonymous with old songs, traditional ballads or oral narrative songs, were the singing domain of a particular kindred group within an extended traveller family, became clear in a discussion with Martha during my last field-work visit to her in 1978. After she had sung "Lady o the Drum" (CH 236), "The Breastbone" (CH 10) and "Banks o Airdrie," I asked her

if her brothers and sisters had sung these songs. She replied, "No, it was my grandfather and my grandmother I heard singing them." (78/109/A3b) Martha did not deny that her brothers and sisters had probably "picked them up" as she had:

> You see, because the old songs — the people sung them, they were easy picked up, the young people easy picked them up. If you were willin to learn, ken? And I likit the old songs although I was young, little.
>
> (78/109/A3b)

The person in her past about whom Martha spoke most on tape was her great-grandfather, David Whyte of Aberdeenshire. He was born in Nairn, Highland Region. In 1957 Martha answered Hamish Henderson's question after her performance of "Banks o Airdrie," "Where'd you learn that one? Who had it?" "Well, as long as I can mind, as long as I can mind I've heard that." When Hamish pressed her for an individual, "Was it one of these, was it Donald Reid [Martha's first father-in-law] or—" "It was my great-grandfather I heard," replied Martha. Hamish asked her more about him and she explained,

> He was . . . yes, he needed to move around for his job, you see, he was aye sellin pictures. They wis, ye ken in the olden days they used to .... but when I remember him he was aye sellin [round the] doors, pictures. People framed them. Ye see, they were great big pictures and they were rolled up, ye see.
>
> H — Oh aye. Were they religious pictures like?
>
> M — All kinds. He sellt all kinds, all kinds of pictures.
>
> (57/7; see plate 1)

In 1977 after Martha had sung the same text and standard strophe of the 1957 variant of "Airdrie," I asked her twice who had sung that song to her. First she replied, "Oh, that was years and years ago, dear;" and then she admitted, "No, I canna tell you the personal singer o that, A can't tell ye where I heard that from." (77/142) Martha had probably had a memory lapse, because a year later

the narrative was closely associated with the memory of her great-grandfather when I asked her after her performance of "Huntingtower" (re. CH 232),

L — Did somebody sing that, how did you learn that one?

M — Oh, oh I heard that from my grandfather, my great-grandfather.

L — Your great-grandfather again.

M — Ye, ye sometimes loss wee bits.

L — Yeh, yeh. When was it that you would listen to him?

M — Eh?

L — When, when was it that you would listen to him — in the evening or in the morning or what was he doing?

M — Well, eh, sometimes he'd be sittin workin with his pictures or anything, ye ken. He'd be sittin singing and I was aye pickin it up.

(77/142)

Another ballad David Whyte had sung was the "Breastbone" (CH 10), and Martha explained after singing it during my last fieldwork visit to her in 1978 when she was seventy-six, that she "was very, very very young when she heard that song:

> I was like wee Willie there [her grandson] when I heard it from my great-grandfather . . . I was awfa quick at pickin up .... I never heard nobody else singing it . . . I just pickit that up from my great-grandfather.
>
> (78/109/A2)

I asked her how many times she thought she'd heard it from him, if she had stayed with him or had he stayed near her?

> Oh well, a few times, which I learned, ye ken . . .
> Well, you see he used to stay a while with us and a while with others of the family, ye ken at the New Year .... he was a widower. He was a lovely singer! A lovely singer.
>
> (78/109/A2)

"Queen Jean" (CH 170), "The Task" (CH 2), "Young Densmore," and "Bonnie Hoose o Airlie" (CH 199) were four other ballads she said she had learned from her great-grandfather. Another was "King William" (CH 7), recorded first by Hamish Henderson in 1957. After her performance he said, "Fine, Martha. When did you first hear it, do ye mind?" She replied, "Oh, that was my great-grandfather again!" Then Hamish questioned her about the source of her tune,

> H — And that was his tune too, was it?
> M — Well, it was his tune at that time, ye see. ....
> H — But, but that was the tune he sang it to?
> M — Yes. That was the tune.
>
> (57/8)

David Whyte's son, Martha's maternal grandfather, was traveller Johnnie Whyte born in Forres, Grampian Region. He was a tinsmith who travelled Inverness-shire and Aberdeenshire with his wares. His wife was traveller Martha MacKenzie born in Strathpeffer, Highland Region. "Lord Randal" (CH 12) was one ballad Martha remembered hearing them sing — "Oh, long ago". (55/50) Her grandmother Whyte's favourite song was "I'll cut off my long Yellow Hair" (CH 106) and Martha sang this ballad on six of the ten occasions she was visited by field-workers, five times without request or prompting.

Mr and Mrs Whyte had twelve children and one, Katie, became Martha's mother. Katie lived until the age of eighty and before she died at Keltney Burn near Callander, Perthshire, she stayed with Martha in the house at Birnam, north of Perth.

On Martha's father's side the men were pipers, some of them outstanding. An uncle was a member of a pipeband during World War I and cousin Andy Whyte played in the Coupar Angus Pipeband. After diddling the "Pap o Glencoe" for Hamish Henderson in 1957 Martha said, laughing,

> Ye ken, I used to diddle with my father, he used to play the practising chanter. That's when I was a wee tot, ye ken, I lost all that now. . . . My father, my grandfather and aa my generation on my father's side were pipers. My father used to go, engaged for to play, at lords' suppers! And I mind on the tune that the man asked him — oh, this lord couldnae get it for, oh, fra anybody — it was 'Moladh Mairi.' Oh yes, oh yes, he could play it. . . . No, he never learned off a book, it was just off the ear.
>
> (1957/8)

Martha's father, Sandy Johnstone, was born in Tayvallich, Strathclyde Region and his father was Johnnie Johnstone, born at Inveraray. After singing "Golden Vanity" in 1978 Martha talked about her paternal ancestry:

> My father's people belonged to the west country, Argyllshire. Johnstones. My great-grandfather — do ye ken the Crinan Canal? Well, there's locks at the top and that's what my great-grandfather kept, the locks. Johnstones, there's lots of em over in Argyllshire yet, has hotels an tea rooms an boarding houses an fishing fleets. And some of them has boats that go out, tugboats, ower to an island. And they got, at that time when I was there, they got a hundred pound goin and a hundred pound comin back and they had seven runs a day. And if there were more people they had more. And then in the winter and that they went away fishing. I expect ther're no many o them left now but at one time — there's some o them has places yet, you know, over there. You wouldna know them. No, just like toffs! Yes. I could pass my own people in the street and no ken them.
>
> (1978/109)

"Reid" is the name of another Argyllshire traveller clan and

Martha's paternal grandmother was one of this family. Her son, Martha's father, preferred to stay in Perthshire, as Martha said, "He was aye workin, ye see. Farm work." (57/7) One ballad Martha distinctly remebered having heard sung, probably en route to or from Argyllshire, was the "Golden Vanity:" "The first time ever I heard that was on Loch Lomond-side from my own parents." (78/109/B3b)

On no less than four occasions Martha's answer to, "Who sang it when you first heard it?" was "the old folks." It might be inferred from this reply that Martha could not remember the one person who sang it first for her. Another inference might be closer to the truth. The individual transmitter of a song was not as important to Martha as it was to the fieldworker; but the idea that a particular type of song had been sung by a certain membership in her society was knowledge worth expressing to interested learners from outside traveller society.

Duncan Williamson's Source Singers.

An account of Duncan's oral sources will show clearly how ballads straddle both singing and storytelling traditions. A description of his early life and travelling years, from 1943 - 1980, is given below, emphasizing the large number of source singers from whose singing Duncan has derived his repertoire of more than forty narrative songs, for a few of which he can sing two or three different texts, re. "Banks o Red Roses" (MC 72) and "The Golden Vanity" (CH 286).

From his father, Jock Williamson, Duncan heard "A Bonnie Bunch of Roses" (MC 85), "Jimmy Foyers" (MC 84), "Bonnie Hoose o Airlie" (CH 199) and "The Shanghaied Sailor" (see ex. 3, chapter two). Duncan heard these narratives regularly from the age of five until he

left home, the age of fifteen. Duncan's father, Jock, was born in Tanguy Glen near Campbeltown in 1892. He worked as a tinsmith, basketmaker, quarry labourer and woodcutter. Every winter for thirty-seven years, from 1925 (three years before Duncan was born), Jock returned to the wood on the Duke of Argyll's Estate at Furnace where he built a "barrikit," a large dome-shaped tent to shelter his family, re. (Williamson, 1983, p. 10). Summer months, March to October, were spent travelling Argyllshire on foot when the entire family would be temporarily employed on various farms thinning turnips, cutting bracken, gathering cloverstones, digging ditches, cutting hedges and harvesting the corn. From 1932 to 1941 Duncan went to school in Furnace because his illiterate father was strict about his children receiving education.

With his schoolmates Duncan used to gather under a road workmen's canopy after school when he was twelve. There the boys told stories, jokes and sang songs. "Wreck of the Hesperus" and "Lord Uillin's Daughter" were two narratives Duncan learned as a schoolboy in 1941. (Interview, 2/84)

From his mother Duncan heard "more love stories," like "Queen Anne" (CH 170), "Come all ye Perthshire Folk" (See Greig, FS 88) and "One Day in Kilmarnock" (See Tocher 21, pp. 181-2, and Sharp CEF 67). (Interview, 2/84) Duncan has recalled his mother singing "Queen Anne" to his younger brother often from the age of five. She was Betsy Townsley, daughter of wandering piper, Jock Townsley, and Bella MacDonald and was born in a cave at Muasdale, Kintyre in 1895. Betsy hawked the village houses while her thirteen children attended school in Furnace, Argyll. Her

mother came to stay with her sometimes during winter months, when Duncan's father would enlarge the "barrikit" by building another bow tent on to the kitchen. Granny MacDonald was a fine storyteller, and it was her narration of "Lord Thomas and Lady Grey" in prose and verse which has since inspired Duncan to attempt the whole story in song, 84/36/B6.

In Tarbert, Loch Fyne, Grandmother Bett MacColl stayed in a bow tent. While Duncan did not visit her very often, after she died he came at least once a month to visit her two unmarried daughters, Nellie and Rachel who each had bow tents next to Bett MacColl's. Rachel and Nellie sang their mother's favourite songs: "Hind Horn" (CH 17) and "Lady Margaret" (CH 39) were two she sang well and Duncan said he'd heard her sing "many many times." (77/149/A5 and cf. 77/202/A1) Bett MacColl was six-foot-two and was abnormally strong, "wore men's boots and was a real warrior of an auld wumman." (77/149/B2) Duncan remembered her identifying with "Young Inverey" (CH 203) — the powerful head of the clan Campbell who was "entitled" to plunder houses and land wherever he wanted. (DW, Interview, 10/84) Bett MacColl also liked the story of "Sweet Ellen of Kirkconnel Lea," re. a woman who was accidentally shot by one of her lovers when he tried to waylay another of the woman's lovers. (DW, Interview, 2/84) According to Duncan, Bett used to hum the tune of this narrative song but when he asked her, "Granny, sing that song, that's a nice wee tune;" she replied, "I cannae sing you the song, but I'll tell you the story." After telling the story of "Sweet Ellen," she'd go on humming the tune.

When Duncan was only two years old he accompanied his father to the hill farm at Achinagoul between Furnace and Inveraray. The farmer, Duncan MacVicar, occasionally employed Duncan's father when he required domestic help. From 1935 to 1955 Duncan himself worked for Mr MacVicar, and because MacVicar never married he enjoyed Duncan's company and "treated him as a son." (Interview, 2/84) MacVicar liked to have a dram when the farm work was not pressing, and then he would sing "Ronald MacDonald" (MC 28), "Jimmy Foyers" (MC 84) and "Golden Vanity" (CH 286). Duncan has sung MacVicar's version of the "Vanity" and noted its difference from the ones he's heard sung by travellers, DC/T 10.A/2.

At the age of fifteen Duncan left Argyll with his older brother Sandy who had secured a regular winter camping place for himself and his family on Whitelea farm, Stanley, Perthshire. When Robbie Townsley, a cousin of Duncan's mother, came for a visit to the Stanley camp, Duncan was anxious to travel and he went with Robbie along to the traditional traveller camping place near Dundee, "The Hoolit's Neuk." There Duncan met three MacDonald sisters who were also his mother's cousins -- Bella, Jeannie and Katherine MacDonald. Katherine told Duncan the story of "The Three Brothers" (CH 188). Her husband, Sandy Townsley, was Robbie's half-brother, and he received Duncan very warmly.

For two years, 1943-1945, Duncan walked with Sandy, "Sapps," and Katie with a hand barrow from Angus through Perthshire to Inverness-shire and Aberdeenshire. They camped at scores of traditional traveller camping places where Duncan made it a point

to hear the old songs, to find more verses of stories his father had partly sung, from the many travellers he was introduced to by Sapps. From Katie and her sister Jeannie Duncan heard two different versions of "The Banks o Red Roses" (MC 72): Jeannie's ended with the making of a family, Katie's ended with a murder. While camped on the "Two-Penny Moor" near Aberdeen, Duncan heard Sapps speak about the fairies and "True Thomas," a version of Child 37 which Sapps had probably heard his stepmother, Katie McCallum, a well-known non-traveller folksinger from Stirling, sing in the 1920s. (See Duncan's testimonies about the source of this ballad in oral tradition, 76/79/B3, 77/147/B3,4.)

From time to time Duncan left Sapps and Katie and went to stay with his Aunt Bella MacDonald. She returned to "The Hangman's Strip," a traditional camping place, near Dunfermline on a regular basis in the 1940s. One of her daughters eventually became Duncan's wife in 1949, but before then, in 1946, Duncan returned to his brother Sandy in Perthshire for a three month stay. He distinctly remembers his sister-in-law Betsy, old Bett McColl's first grandchild, singing narratives to her children, to entertain them when they were restless and to put them to sleep — "Hind Horn," "Lady Margaret" and "Sweet Ellen of Kirkconnel Lea" — the same narratives which had been sung by her grandmother Bett McColl; for Betsy had been reared by old Bett. See plate 2.

The winter of 1947 was severe, many travellers camped in the highlands of Perthshire were snowbound. Duncan had been staying with Sapps and Katie in Kirriemuir and when the weather broke, they moved to a house in Fraserburgh. Nearby lived traveller Sandy Whyte who told Duncan he knew "Johnnie o Monymusk" (CH 114), but when Duncan asked him to sing it he replied, "Laddie, God kens I'm no singer, but I'll tell you the story." (Interview, 2/84)

In 1949 Duncan married his cousin Jean Townsley, and until 1967 Jean's mother, Bella MacDonald, stayed with them — travelling in the warm months of the year and staying in a gelly (a bow tent enlarged to accommodate an internal fire fashioned from a dairy urn and tin chimney, see plates 1 and 2, Preface) or a house in the colder months. From his mother-in-law Duncan heard many narratives sung, some of which he endeavoured to learn: "Lord Uillin's Daughter," "Dowie Dens" (CH 214), "Death o Queen Jean" (a favourite of Bella's; CH 170) "Hoose o Airlie," "Hind Horn" (with a different refrain from his grandmother's version), "Ronald MacDonald" and "Lord Ronald" (CH 12). "The Three Brothers" (CH 188) was first sung to him when Duncan had said to Bella, "That's a good story your sister told about the three brothers." She had replied, "That's not a story, that's a song — I'll sing it to you." (Interview, 2/84)

Bella MacDonald had introduced Duncan to many more travellers on their travels through Ayrshire, Angus, Renfrewshire, Kincardine, the Borders (Peebles and Dumfries), Wigtownshire in the summer months, Perthshire and Fife. In 1953 in Ayrshire Duncan met his uncle Sandy Reid while thinning turnips. From him Duncan heard "Jimmy Foyers" and the "Hoose o Airlie," also a few verses of "Sir Patrick Spens" (CH 58)

which Sandy had learned from his mother, Bella Cameron of Dunbartonshire. (Interview, 2/84) Parts of "Golden Vanity" and "Wexford County" were also sung by Uncle Sandy for Duncan.

Despite the jealous nature of his wife Jean, Duncan persevered in joining campfire ceilidhs for the purpose of adding to his repertoire of songs and stories. From 1954 - 1962 he says he did not learn any new songs or hear anything much different from what he already knew. (Interview, 2/84) Because he had a good voice, according to the travellers, and enjoyed singing, he was often asked for a song. He had made an effort to remember and learn songs since he was seventeen, for "he felt embarassed if he couldn't give a traveller what they wanted to hear." (Int., 2/84)

From 1963 - 1968 Duncan bought a Phillips tape recorder to collect songs from the old travellers. His puposes were twofold: to give traveller singers the enjoyment of hearing themselves sing, and to add songs to his own repertoire. Mrs Williamson became seriously ill with heart disease and when hospitalization became necessary in 1967, Duncan had to give up song collecting and take care of their young children. The tapes he recorded are in the possession of Dr Helen Fullarton, see Preface, p. v; and the author. But many of the hundreds recorded have been lost or loaned to friends who have not returned them.

From 1968 - 1975 during the months, August - October, Duncan was camped near Muthill, Perthshire, for the potato harvest. There Robbie Townsley, the man who had first taken him to Dundee in 1943, kept Duncan company during his wife's terminal illness. Robbie knew many narrative songs, a "better" version of "The Three Brothers,"

"Green the Ganger," "My Son Ronald" (CH 12), "Lady Margaret" (CH 39) and "Sir James the Rose." (CH 213) Some of these he only sang in part and narrated a part in prose. Robbie's sister Rachel also sang for Duncan, to his surprise she sang "King John and the Bishop" (CH 45), which Duncan had come to regard only as a story — the way his father had narrated it but never sang.

Since marrying the author in 1976 Duncan has not learned any new narratives, apart from "Bonnie George Campbell" (CH 210), memorized from the author's taped recording of Nellie Stewart's performance, 75/131/A4. In 1982 Duncan invited Robbie Townsley to stay with him for a few weeks, so the two of them could collaborate on some narrative fragments Duncan knew. The result was the completion of Duncan's "Lady Margaret," discussed in chapter four. Until 1982, the song had never been more than a partially sung and spoken fairy story in Duncan's repertoire. The majority of Duncan's twenty-two narrative song fragments are in a state of suspension because he is, at least temporarily, leading a settled life and does not have regular sing-songs or ceilidhs with older traveller singers. Hopefully a travelling life may one day be resumed; Duncan's narrative fragments may then be completed.

Plate 1. Martha Johnstone shows off one of her great-grandfather's pictures, "Young Densmore." Coupar Angus, 1977.

Plate 2. Betsy Townsley Williamson listens to her brother-in-law sing "Lady Margaret," an old song he originally heard from her. Strathmiglo, 1984.

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